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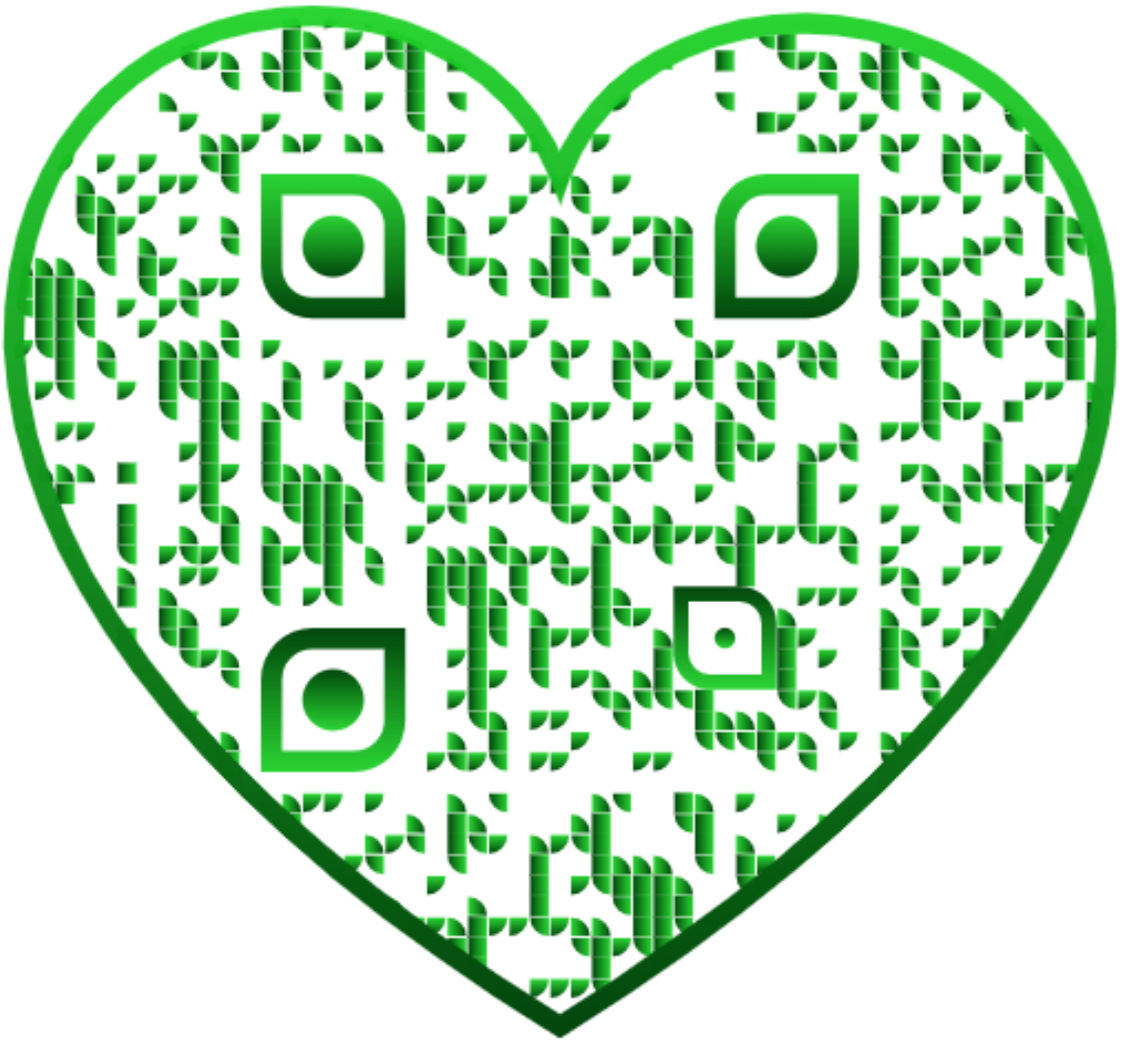

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ISSUE 138 10.03.23

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MAGICTORCH/GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

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The story of the band's groundbreaking *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*...

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A TOUR DE FORCE OF FINNISH MELONCHOLIA.

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PROG PRESENTS...

Arjen Lucassen sampler – handpicked by Arjen himself

MUSIC THEORIES RECORDINGS

PRESS/LORI LINSTRUTH

Celebrate Arjen Lucassen's golden age of music.

Since 1995, when he released *Ayreon: The Final Experiment*, Arjen Lucassen's imagination and ambition have flourished, unfettered by convention. Albums centred around a conceptual theme began to attract the attention of a burgeoning audience interested in new progressive sounds. For 1998's *Into The Electric Castle*, he collaborated with artists from the prog and metal worlds, namely Fish, Anneke van Giersbergen, Sharon den Adel, Damian Wilson, Thijs van Leer, Ton Scherpenzeel and Edward Reekers from Kayak, and Clive Nolan. This was the masterstroke that would bring his musical vision the wider acclaim that he so clearly sought. Explore his supersonic universe with this free digital sampler, curated by Arjen Lucassen himself.

The two-part *Universal Migrator* albums, released in 2000, saw Bruce Dickinson, Floor Jansen, Russell Allen and Neal Morse join the ever-impressive list of musicians featured on Ayreon albums. Later on, he would add such luminaries as Mikael Åkerfeldt, Devin Townsend, Steve Hackett, Keith Emerson and Rick Wakeman on *The Human Equation* (2004), *01011001* (2008) and *The Theory Of Everything* (2012). In 2009, Lucassen's Guilt Machine released their sole album, *On This Perfect Day*, in which he explored psychology and the secrets we keep from ourselves, which listeners could experience on *Green And Cream* and *Twisted Coil*.

The Human Equation was brought to the stage as a theatre production with many of its original vocalists in 2015, and 2017's *The Source* was another star-studded conceptual affair, this time boasting Dream Theater's James LaBrie, Marillion's Mark Kelly and Epica's Simone Simons. *Transitus* was released in 2020 and was built around an entirely new story, with guest performances from Tom Baker (*Doctor Who*), Simone Simons, Dee Snider (Twisted Sister), Joe Satriani, Marty Friedman and more. *SR Prelude/ The Glamattack* is taken from Lucassen's as-yet-unreleased spectacular new project, Arjen Lucassen's Supersonic Revolution. *Golden Age Of Music* is out on May 19.

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4 Ayreon
The First Man On Earth
Taken from *Universal Migrator*

5 Ayreon
Day Two: Isolation
Taken from *The Human Equation*

6 Ayreon
Comatose
Taken from *01011001*

7 Ayreon
The Theory Of Everything Part 1
Taken from *The Theory Of Everything*

8 Ayreon
The Day That The World Breaks Down
Taken from *The Source*

9 Ayreon
Message From Beyond
Taken from *Transitus*

10 Arjen Lucassen's Guilt Machine
Green And Cream
Taken from *On This Perfect Day*

11 Arjen Lucassen's Guilt Machine
Twisted Coil
Taken from *On This Perfect Day*

12 Arjen Lucassen's Supersonic Revolution
SR Prelude/ The Glamattack
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Ed's Letter

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Stream the Prog 138 playlist at www.spoti.fi/3lZAVJ4

Hello, and welcome to the new issue of *Prog* magazine. March already? (Well, the end of February as I write this!) How time flies. It seems like only yesterday I was welcoming you to the first issue of the year, but here we are, with a new issue and plans afoot that take the magazine deep into 2023!

As for this issue, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of, as our cover says, "one of the most audacious, inventive and imaginative albums" in the whole of 70s progressive rock. King Crimson's fifth record, *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*, is yet another intriguing chapter in the King Crimson story, and another example of Robert Fripp's tenacious ability to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat and create something mesmeric, momentous and memorable. Oh, while we're talking about audacious, inventive and imaginative albums, yes, we *are* aware another big album celebrates its 50th anniversary in March, but everyone's going to be covering that! Some of those aforementioned plans for later in the year include something pretty big for the band in question, and hey, we wouldn't be prog if we followed the pack!

Elsewhere we traverse from the folk prog of the 70s with Magna Carta to the modern-day take on progressive music that Radiohead bring, taking in the likes of Haken, eMolecule, Damanek, Solstice, Ne Obliviscaris, Square Wild, Klone, The Butterfly Effect, Jah Wobble and more along the way. Check out our free digital sampler where Ayreon mainman Arjen Lucassen has handpicked his own music for you to enjoy. Thanks, Arjen!

Also this issue we begin our partnership with Progzilla Radio to promote up-and-coming prog bands. You'll be able to hear music from this issue's Limelight and All Around The World bands played throughout the month on Progzilla Radio – the UK's only dedicated progressive rock radio network.

Thanks for joining us. I hope to see you next month too. Until then, stay safe. And prog on...

Jerry Ewing – Editor

NEXT ISSUE APR 14 ON SALE

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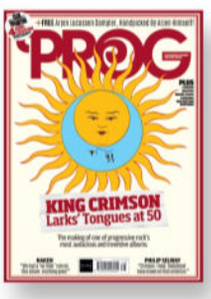

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SAT 29 JUL	LIVERPOOL	O2 ACADEMY
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ALL HAIL THE NEW KINGS

So the Readers' Poll 2022 [*Prog* 136] sent a pretty clear message — hardly a prog god or 'Big Six' member in sight! Looks like the handover to the next generation is virtually complete and if there was any doubt just look at which Wakeman is in the top keyboardist list (it ain't Rick).

Interesting to note that (I) while the Big Six bands dominate the reissues and *Prog* covers categories, the only big sixer in the best album listing is Jethro Tull (although perversely they also feature in the disappointment category) and there's less than a handful of big sixers in the musician listings.

(II) the only big sixer in three categories — i.e. reissues, covers and albums — is, again, Jethro Tull. (Does that make them the biggest of the Big Six, I wonder?) Presumably the conclusion to be drawn from all this is that, although the oldies are fighting a healthy rearguard action and can still sell *Prog* mags and box sets, the scene is now firmly in the hands of the 'newcomers'!

This, of course, is as it should be. The 'new' prog bands, which have come into being since the mid-90s, are supremely talented, incredibly numerous and have taken prog into completely new territory. Ironically not many of my personal favourites made it into the poll — just Porcupine Tree, Riverside, Mostly Autumn, Solstice, Dream Theater and The Flower Kings (although come to think of it that's maybe not bad?!). It is a testament to the quality of this amazing music that I could list another 100 or more in my collection which didn't make the cut. Maybe we could have top 20 lists instead of top 10 and thereby give much-needed encouragement and exposure to even more of these artists and musicians?

Graham Smith, London

BUT DON'T FORGET THE OLDIES!

After the last few barren years, we are now really looking forward to our gigs in 2023. These are: Rick Wakeman at the London Palladium (twice), Steve Hillage at the O2 Academy Bristol, Sparks at the Royal Albert Hall, Roger Waters at the O2 London, Peter Gabriel at the 3 Arena Dublin, Jon Anderson at the O2 Shepherds Bush Empire and Wishbone Ash (Andy Powell) at St George's Bristol.

It has just occurred to me that all these individuals are in their 70s, which is a tribute to their longevity and talent, and we can't wait to see them. Can you imagine the stars of today lasting as long and being as successful?

Mike O'Connor, Bristol

Prog 137: Rick with Henry's wives.

PRESS/YORK TILLYER

Oi, no heckling! *Prog* readers are looking forward to Peter Gabriel's 2023 live shows.

SIX WIVES AND TWO RICKS

I saw the cover of *Prog* 137 on the Burning Shed website. I ended up buying [Rick Wakeman's album *The Six Wives Of Henry VIII*] because it was reviewed in *Time* magazine, I believe, and my mother actually brought it to my attention and she wanted it because it talked about the organs that Rick had used in the recording in Europe. So we ended up with two copies of it, one for her in the living room and one for me in the basement, because my stereo was better and I didn't want it ruined on her not very good record player Needless to say I've purchased most of Rick Wakeman's albums since then.

Graham Mino, Toronto

LAMBING SEASON

As I was lucky enough to see Genesis' last tour at Madison Square Garden, it was a wonderful and a sad experience. The end of Genesis and Phil's physical demise. I'm so appreciative of his efforts to perform but it's brought tears to my eyes.

As I was listening to *The Lamb...* today, Tony needs to get over his obsession about Peter. He always is dismissive of the album but it is still one of their greatest accomplishments. All of their albums were meaningful in my life and at different times.

I saw *The Lamb...* in Houston, Texas 1975 when the slide show worked perfectly. It was transformative.

To quote *The Cinema Show*: *'Once a man, like the sea I raged/Once a woman, like the earth I gave/But there is in fact more earth than sea.'*

Gordon Strole, via email

TWO SECONDS OF FAME?

Your announcement of the five-CD box set from Genesis, including their 1978 Knebworth performance, made me wonder if my tiny 'claim to fame' will be audible on that recording?!

I am not a serial heckler nor was I alcohol fuelled, but as the 'lawn mower' sound at the start of *I Know What I Like (In Your Wardrobe)* and Phil Collins' gestures reached the crucial point, I awaited the exact moment and shouted at the top of my voice: "What time is it?" and right on cue, Phil of course

TWEET TALK

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NICK BEGGS
@NickBeggs
Don't know about you, but when I start thinking about the planet spinning through space at 30k per second I get a bit travel sick.

OLIVER WAKEMAN

OLIVER WAKEMAN
@OliverWakeman
Another great day recording drums with @ScottHigham and @karlgroom for the new Anam Cara album. We're all finished now. I even persuaded Scott to add some Bodhrán in places! More guitars to listen to tonight from @OliverDayGuitar. I'm having a great time working on this album.

ROBIN ARMSTRONG
@cosmograf
Right wing 'anti woke' Pink Floyd fans... Did they never listen to Roger's lyrics? Perhaps they thought *Animals* was about a farm in Texas?...

LETTER

I have been thinking about contacting you before now. but unfortunately I was in the veterans' hospital during the last three months. I was released on February 1 and am now home. Friends thankfully brought me a copy of *Prog* 133 while I was still in the hospital. My life-threatening experience there makes this email seem even more important.

Several years ago — while still living in the San Francisco Bay area — I designed a concert poster for a Yes and Asia show at the Warfield Theater in SF. The poster is a seven-colour screen print made with translucent and metallic inks. The artwork and design were my homage to the album covers that Roger Dean designed for both bands.

I was invited to the concert by the promoter. In between sets, someone brought Chuck Sperry (my friend, the printer of the poster and my fellow poster artist) and me backstage. He said that Roger Dean wanted to meet us. Members of Yes and Asia chuckled as they walked past us, while changing places on stage.

We had such a good time with Roger, that he invited us to spend the next day with him at his gallery show on Sutter Street. Both Chuck and I gave him a handful of our past concert posters. Chuck — being the smart guy he is — brought one of the Yes and Asia posters along to the gallery. He asked Roger to sign it. So, that one copy is signed by both Roger and I.

Chuck Sperry, Dennis Loren and Roger Dean with Loren's design.

Attached is a photo of Chuck, me and Roger holding a copy of the poster at the gallery.

Dennis Loren, via email

This issue's star letter wins a goodie bag from burningshed.com *Contents may vary*

announced, "It's one o'clock and time for lunch!"

I received huge laughs from hundreds around me, albeit we're only talking about a portion of the crowd, in the middle of a vast sea of people! I've got back in my box (set) for the intervening 45 years, ha ha!

John Ferguson, via email

A WORTHY REQUEST

For many years now I have enjoyed my subscription to your fine magazine. Every month I am eager to find which bands from the old days will feature in the mag. I am a 65-years-young Dutch reader so have witnessed a lot of the 'old' prog bands rise and shine (or fall). I am an avid Genesis, Yes, Kansas, Rush and ELP fan, and am always on the lookout for CDs of the last band.

Recently I have found a similar-sounding German band, Triumvirat! Their keyboard player, Jürgen Fritz, is surely as good as Keith Emerson. His Moog and Hammond styles are equally impressive. Listen to their album *Spartacus*: a true epic ELP-sounding masterpiece! Or *Panic At 5th Avenue* from their *Old Love Dies Hard* album. Unfortunately they are no more but their albums are still available and worth a listen. Any chance for an article on Triumvirat or Jürgen Fritz in the near future? I'd love to find out what he does now.

Ed Mei, The Netherlands

We asked that very same question back in Prog 36 but as a decade has passed since then, we decided to re-investigate. In addition to composing film music, Fritz has spent the last few decades working as a musical director for German vocalist Tommy Engel. As for Triumvirat, their last known recording was The Book Of Life Part 1: The Website Story in 1999, which, to date, remains unreleased. — Dep. Ed.

FULL HOUSE

I can proudly say that I love *Prog* and treasure every issue. It feels like Christmas every time I receive the magazine. And please, in spite of the (soon-to-be) lack of space on my shelf (see picture!), do not stop printing the magazine. I will start another shelf soon!

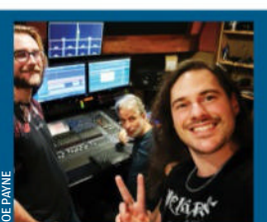
Philippe Claerhout, France

That's a lot of *Progs*! Reader Philippe Claerhout's very impressive collection.

PHILIPPE CLAERHOUT

KARNIVOOL
@karnivool
It took literally years to make this tour happen. We bloody love ya, and will hopefully see you soon. We play Dubai tomorrow on the way home - looking forward to that!

THAT JOE PAYNE
@thatjoepayne
Studio day with @jakeperrettdrums and @maxjosephread! #NewAlbum2023



JOE PAYNE

THE ANCHORESS
@The_Anchoress
I'm so excited to be coming back to the stage finally on tour this spring with my amazing band

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INTRO

IF IT'S OUT THERE, IT'S IN HERE

YES RETURN WITH *MIRROR TO THE SKY*

With drummer Jay Schellen now officially a member, the prog giants return with their 23rd studio album. Exclusively for *Prog*, Steve Howe reflects on the band's latest opus.

***Prog* can exclusively** reveal that progressive rock legends Yes will release their 23rd studio album later this year.

Out on May 19 through InsideOut, *Mirror To The Sky* will be their first release since 2021's *The Quest*, and their first full recording with drummer Jay Schellen, formally announced as the late Alan White's replacement in February. Says the band's guitarist Steve Howe, in his first interview for the release, "The album is dedicated to Alan.

"We can never overwrite the fact that we miss the guy [White died in May 2022]. Jay's had a lot of experience as our number two drummer from the periods when Alan wasn't strong enough to do the whole show with us, and on this he's come to the fore."

Schellen played some percussion on *The Quest*, and this new material, Howe says, has its roots in the final sessions for that record.

"As we were finishing *The Quest* there were some other musical ideas I was particularly interested in tagging together and working out into some larger pieces. So we started *Mirror To The Sky* with two 10-minute tracks, which became *Luminosity* and the [14-minute] title track. Going into the next record it was really encouraging to have those two tracks. All we had to do then was make them grow, and see who had what songs and what collaborations could take place."

Howe, bassist Billy Sherwood, keyboardist Geoff Downes and vocalist Jon Davison all pitched in, with Howe particularly enamoured by a new Davison tune, *Circles Of Time* ("It's simple in texture and presentation," says the guitarist, "but musically complex, there's a lot of things happening.") Other song titles include album opener *Cut From The Stars*, *All Connected*, and *Living Out Their Dream*.

The record came together over 2022. Once again Howe produced, in close concert with trusted engineer, Curtis Schwartz. Performances were captured in the members' own studios and various other recording facilities, and – again as with *The Quest* – *Mirror...* is given extra depth by the work of Macedonia's Fames Studio Orchestra, arranged again by Paul J Noyce.

If the album's striking title and the song names imply some metaphysical or spiritual lyrical concept, that wasn't really intentional.

"I think we're experts at making albums. I mean, we ought to be!"

"The songs had to go through a corridor," the guitarist explains. "There had to be a conformity of sorts, and one had to stream in with the others. *Living Out Their Dream* is purposely a bit way out lyrically, but a lot of the other stories are much more romantic, and interested in our history, our philosophy.

"We should all be trying to achieve happiness but there's a lot of things that get in the way of that, and *One Second Is Enough* is about that."

That song is one of three on the album's second disc, completed by *Unknown Place* and *Magic Potion*. Howe is reticent to call these 'bonus tracks' for fear of implying they're of lesser quality, or bolted on: "We just had a lot of material to work on, and those three songs weren't worked in a different way to the rest of the album. But the main CD, those six tracks, that substantiates an album.

"We make albums, we love albums. They're not just collections of songs, they have to be in a certain order and flow in a certain kind of way. I think we're experts at making albums. I mean, bloody hell, we ought to be!"

The first Yes album to get a Dolby Atmos mix, *Mirror To The Sky* will be available in numerous formats, from standard two-CD jewel case to a deluxe two-LP/two-CD/one-Blu-ray with artbook. For a full list of all options, pre-orders and the latest updates on the band and album go to www.yesworld.com. **GRM**

Looking up!: Yes are back with their newly permanent drummer Jay Schellen (far left) on *Mirror To The Sky*.

PRESS/GOTTLIEB BROS

This month, Intro was compiled by

Jeremy Allen
Dave Everley
Jerry Ewing
Ralph Greco, Jr
Dom Lawson
Gary Mackenzie
Rhodri Marsden
Matt Mills
Grant Moon
Natasha Scharf

EVERYONE'S A VIP FOR PENDRAGON!

The British proggers to play six shows and unveil new mini-album, *North Star*.

PRESS/RACHEL WILCE

The VIP table: Pendragon.

British prog veterans Pendragon are releasing a new mini-album, and have lined up a series of shows in support. The 25-minute *North Star* will be available in May and features three brand new songs comprising *North Star Parts 1-3: A Boy And His Dog, As Dead As A Dodo* and *Phoenician Skies*.

"The North Star has guided mankind out of trouble for thousands of years," explains the band's guitarist and vocalist Nick Barrett, "and this is a positive message that uses this as a way forward for everyone after the last three years, without mentioning the wretched 'C-word'."

North Star will initially be available on CD at a series of six shows Pendragon are playing over three consecutive weekends in May in the Netherlands, the UK and Norway (with a wider release to follow). Dubbed 'Everyone's A VIP!', each pair of gigs will see Pendragon playing all of 2020 album *Love Over Fear* and "a tonne of other favourites" on the first night; the second night will feature 2001's *Not Of This World* in its entirety together with an acoustic set and onstage Q&A.

The gigs will mark the debuts of new backing singers Johanna Stroud and Sally Minnear (daughter of Gentle Giant's Kerry Minnear). Pendragon will be joined onstage by 12-string guitarist Roger Patterson, who is also opening the show. The 'Everyone's A VIP!' shows take place at The Boerderij, Zoetermeer, Holland on May 12-13; The Platform, Morecambe, UK on May 20-21; and the We Love Rock festival, Norway on May 26-27.

Tickets available at www.bit.ly/pendragontix. **DEV**

ESBEN AND THE WITCH ON THEIR "PUREST" ALBUM YET

Hold Sacred is the trio's sixth LP, and "perhaps their last".

British dark prog trio Esben And The Witch will release their sixth album, *Hold Sacred*, on May 12 via Nostromo Records.

The "brooding, gentle, almost ambient" record is their first since *Nowhere*, from 2018. "Everything's changed and nothing's changed," says vocalist Rachel Davies. "This kernel is the purest essence of Esben And The Witch since our inception."

That was over 14 years ago, in Brighton, and these days the trio — Davies, Thomas Fisher and Daniel Copeman — are split across the UK, US and Germany. The new songs, including current single *The Well*, took shape in summer 2019, when the three decamped to a villa near Rome to write. "This is the sound of three people who love and support each other," says Davies, "navigating the ever-present figure of the black dog. Perhaps this record will be our last, or perhaps it's just another beginning."

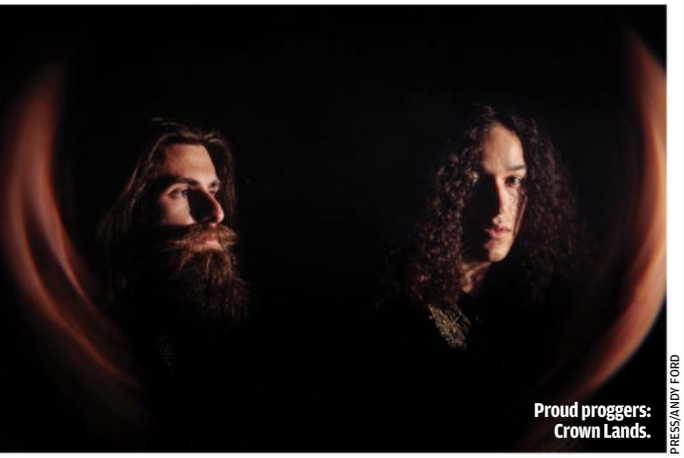
The band will play Europe and the UK this year. More at www.bit.ly/esbenprog. **GRM**

Sacred beings: Esben And The Witch.

PRESS/SOPHIE FOX

FEARLESS CROWN LANDS ARE BACK

The Canadian prog rock duo return with their mighty second album this spring.



Proud proggers: Crown Lands.

PRESS/ANDY FORD

Eighteen months after releasing the seven-minute, Rush-inspired single *Context: Fearless Pt. I*, Canadian duo Crown Lands will unveil their second album on March 31. Out on Spinefarm/Universal Music Canada, *Fearless* finds them leaning even further into their prog influences.

"We wanted to make an epic album that has an epic story," says vocalist/drummer Cody Bowles. "A side-long track on one side and shorter songs on the second, just like *2112* and all the other albums we love."

Fearless completes Crown Lands' transition from White Stripes-adjacent modern blues rockers into a more complex and interesting beast. The nine-track album opens with the sweeping 18-minute, multipart *Starlifter: Fearless Pt. II*, which continues the sci-fi-influenced tale of the titular intergalactic hero, laid out on 2021 single *The Oracle* and continuing through *Fearless Pt. I* (the latter's on the new LP).

"After *Fearless Pt. I*," says bassist/keyboard player Kevin Comeau, "our record label said, 'Maybe on the next record, give us shorter songs that we can pitch to Spotify.' We went and wrote an 18-minute sci-fi prog epic! But we were really gung-ho about telling the story we wanted to tell."

The pair's prog fandom is in evidence, from Bowles' Bill Bruford-inspired drumming and Comeau's double-necked guitar and washes of vintage synths to the occasional tricksy 11/8 passage or — on the propulsive *Reflection* — a lyrical reference to Mahavishnu Orchestra's *Inner Mounting Flame*.

"Earlier on in our career, we were almost told to tone down the prog stuff," says Comeau. "And we kind of did, but we always snuck a 7/8 or a 9/8 riff into our more radio rock-leaning songs. But now we're heartily embracing the 'prog' title we've been getting lately. We're unabashed fans of all the greats, from Yes and King Crimson to Gentle Giant and Van der Graaf Generator."

Yet it's Rush who remain their north star. In late 2021, at a charity show in Toronto, they jammed Led Zeppelin songs with, among others, Alex Lifeson.

"We met Alex in rehearsals and we were trying to play it cool," says Bowles. "It was so funny — Kevin was standing behind him playing every little Rush lick he knew, and Alex kept giving him dagger eyes: 'Don't do it!' But it was truly special to hang out as musicians as well as fans."

The band tour Canada in July. **DEV**

> **"We embrace our 'prog' title - we're unabashed fans of the greats."**

More information on the band and album at www.crownlandsmusic.com.

INTRO extras

PROG OUT IN FORCE FOR RECORD STORE DAY!

Yes, Porcupine Tree, Mike Oldfield, ELP, Brian Eno and Gong are among the artists releasing music for this year's Record Store Day, taking place on April 22. Standouts include: Yes' three-LP set *Live At Knoxville Civic Auditorium* (recorded in 1972); new Porcupine Tree 12" *IA/DW/XT* (with tracks from *Deadwing* and *In Absentia* previously unreleased on vinyl) and a 50th anniversary picture disc of ELP's *Brain Salad Surgery*. More on these and this life-affirming event at recordstoreday.co.uk

The *Wait* is over: Hawkwind are back.

PRESS/MARIANNE HARRIS

THE FUTURE IS HERE FOR HAWKWIND

With live shows incoming, Dave Brock and crew explore inner space on album 35.

Hawkwind have announced their brand-new album, and have been confirmed as the Saturday headliners for the UK edition of this year's Prognosis Festival.

The space rock icons' 35th studio album, *The Future Never Waits* is released on April 28 by Cherry Red, and frontman Dave Brock tells *Prog* that it's based on "the internal circle of life we all go through. It starts off with the end and finishes with the beginning. It's an unusual concept, back to front. The words are about people's state of mind. Whatever gets you through the night, even though your mind is not right. You lay in bed and think about all these things, and it's easy to get tormented."

Songs include 10-minute instrumental title track, plus *They Are So Easily Distracted, Rama (Prophecy), I'm Learning To Live Today* and *I'm Trapped In This Modern Age*. Joining Brock in the current line-up are drummer Richard Chadwick, vocalist, guitarist, violist Magnus Martin, bassist Doug MacKinnon and the band's multi-instrumentalist, Tim 'Thighpaulsandra' Lewis.

"On the last album [2021's *Somnia*], we worked together for a while and then it was the lockdown thing," says Brock. "This one here, we've all been together. Being in a room together means we can make songs out quite easily."

The band headline Prognosis Festival at Indigo at the O2 Arena in London on April 23, before their own short tour kicks off at Manchester Academy on the album's release day, April 28.

All dates, and more on the album, at www.hawkwind.com. **DEV**

BLOOD CEREMONY TO TAKE IT BACK TO *THE OLD WAYS*

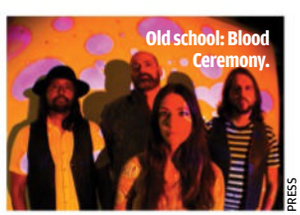
The Torontonians return with new LP and Euro/UK tour.

Toronto psych-proggers Blood Ceremony are to release their first full-length album in seven years, and will tour the UK and Europe in May.

The Old Ways Remain will come out on May 5 through Rise Above Records. It's the quartet's fifth album, and follows 2016's *Lord Of Misrule*. The plan was to record at London's Toe Rag Studios in 2021 but, 'what with one thing and another', they ended up laying it down at a local Toronto studio. The band (vocalist/flautist Alia O'Brien, guitarist Sean Kennedy, bassist Lucas Gadke and drummer Michael Carillo) produced *The Old Ways Remain* themselves along with friend Paul Keyahas, and recruited guest musicians including Laura Bates, fiddler for folk-doom crew, Völur.

"The album is a continuation of our sound," Kennedy says, "although with every album we try to push ourselves in some new musical directions."

Blood Ceremony's May tour is with labelmates Uncle Acid & The Deadbeats in May — for full dates go to www.bit.ly/bloodtour. **GRM**



Old school: Blood Ceremony.

PRESS

A little taster from Amplifier.

PRESS/AMPLIFIER

AMPLIFIER MAKE THEIR *HOLOGRAM*

Upcoming mini-album is an "entrée" for the band's long-awaited new LP, *Gargantuan*.

Sel Balamir's band Amplifier will release their new mini-album, *Hologram*, this spring via Rockosmos. The record comprise five songs that emerged during writing sessions for the band's highly anticipated seventh full-lengther, *Gargantuan*.

"It's an appetiser for the main album," Balamir tells *Prog*, "but *Gargantuan* is its own kind of entity. These songs just didn't fit the mould. The album's huge and these are much more concise nibbles. It's an entrée: a dim sum entrée."

Hologram's lead single, *Two Way Mirror*, is currently streaming via Bandcamp and available as a free download. Awooga's Tam Ali guests on *Sweet Perfume* – Balamir describes that song as "Nirvana puking into a bucket", the title track as "spacey and reflective", and he compares *Tundra* to "Turkish Jethro Tull".

The mini-album will be out on April 14, but the band's Patreon members already have access to the record, and those on their mailing list will be able to get it from March 26.

Meanwhile, Amplifier (currently just Balamir and long-term musical partner Matt Drobin) are beavering away at *Gargantuan*, which will be their first album proper since 2017 offering, *Trippin' With Dr Faustus*.

"There are some songs to finish off," he reveals, "and there are some holes to fill, but I kinda know the shape of those holes. So I'm saying it'll be another six months. But I also know that, whenever I say any time, it takes longer than that!"

More on all this at www.amplifierband.com. **MM**

INTRO extras

ARJEN LUCASSEN'S *GOLDEN AGE*!

Dutch prog maverick Arjen Lucassen returns with a new band and album this year. Out on May 19 via Music Theories/Mascot, the 15-track *Golden Age Of Music* will be the debut of Arjen Lucassen's Supersonic Revolution. The Ayreon star describes the new quintet as an "upbeat, positive project. I was like, 'Let's form a band and write songs in the style of the 70s, and have the lyrics be a celebration of all the memorable things from that time.'" For info and pre-orders go to arjenlucassen.com.

BIG BIG TRAIN TO TOUR AND RELEASE *INGENIOUS DEVICES*

A fresh face in the group and Abbey Road strings on new LP.

It's all change again for Big Big Train, as they announce their 16-date The Journey Continues Tour and upcoming record, *Ingenious Devices*.

Keyboardist Carly Bryant stepped down from the group in February, citing family commitments, and has been replaced by Oskar Holldorff. The Norwegian deputised for Bryant during BBT's brief run of shows last September, with his own band Dim Gray also supporting. He will contribute to the next studio album, due next year, and next March will join BBT for their co-headline slot on the Cruise To The Edge.

Depping: Maria Barbieri.

PRESS/BIG BIG TRAIN

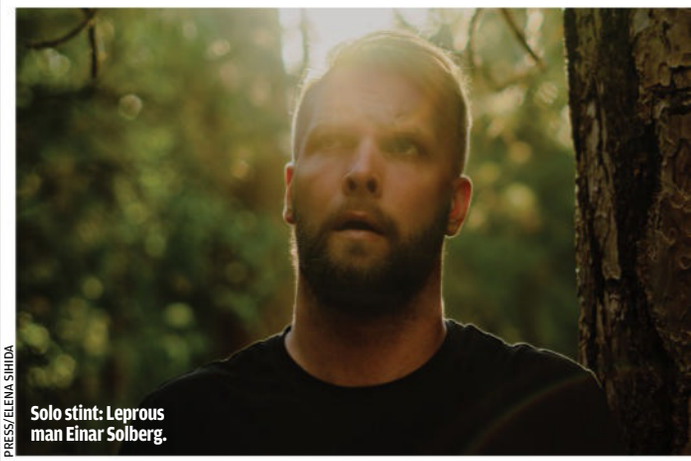
The Journey Continues Tour runs from this August 26 to September 13, with rising Italian guitarist Maria Barbieri standing in for Dave Foster, who's still a BBT member but had prior commitments to the Steve Rothery Band.

June 30 will see the release of *Ingenious Devices*, featuring a new piece and re-orchestrations of material including signature tune, *East Coast Racer*. Notably, the album's lush string sections were recorded in Abbey Road's Studio Two.

More on all this at www.bigbigtrain.com. **GRM**

SWEET *16*? LEPROUS SINGER GOES SOLO

Einar Solberg's debut album features Ihsahn and members of Bent Knee, Vola and more.



Solo stint: Leprous man Einar Solberg.

PRESS/ELENA SIHIDA

Leprous singer, songwriter and synth player Einar Solberg will release his debut solo album, *16*, on June 2 via InsideOut. The 11-song LP features collaborations with a host of prog musicians, including Bent Knee's Ben Levin, Vola's Asger Mygind and Agent Fresco's Tóti Guðnason. Lead single *Grotto* is currently streaming.

Talking to *Prog*, Solberg sees *16* as versatile, but, he says: "I don't think it's going to be mind-blowingly surprising, apart from one or two tracks, because Leprous has been challenging our crowds for many years."

He does reveal that the Levin collaboration, *Home*, is "a hip hop song with actual rapping", and reckons that the heaviest song on here is *Splitting The Soul*, made with his brother-in-law, prog metal maverick Ihsahn.

The idea of a solo record first came to Solberg in 2018, when he returned home from touring in support of Leprous' *Malina* album: "Before I went on tour, my schedule was extremely packed, and when I came home, there was nothing. It was just silence, and that doesn't sit very well with me: I need to create. I need to do things that are meaningful. Being dependent on the Leprous schedule to tell me when I'm allowed to feel creative started to feel like a prison."

The actual songwriting began after Leprous released *Pitfalls* in 2019, and ideas were recorded as and when they were ready, with Solberg tracking most of his parts in Ghost Ward Studios, Stockholm.

Solberg will play two live shows in the run-up to *16*, at the Eindhoven and London editions of Prognosis Festival, April 15 and 22 respectively. "Honestly, how many more [solo shows] there will be will depend on the demand," he says. He reveals that there will definitely be more solo records from him in the future: "I have four songs on this album that are by me alone, and I would like to make one full album like that, to see how it turns out."

That said, Solberg continues to front Leprous and promises his solo project will not interfere with the band's schedule: "Leprous will continue to be a very active band. We're doing good together, the vibe is great, and I think the solo project has made it even better now I have that creative outlet I need somewhere else. It's not a Devin Townsend or Steven Wilson thing!" **MM**

Stay up to date with Einar's activities at www.facebook.com/einarsolbergofficial.

"Silence doesn't sit well with me. I need to create, to do something meaningful."

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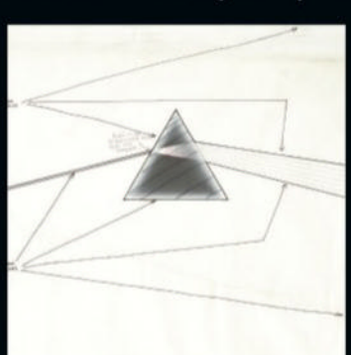

PINK FLOYD

50

THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

FAD GADGETS

Rhodri Marsden on three of the latest must-have gizmos currently putting the prog in progress.

SONY NW-A306 WALKMAN

Not to start a fight, but I've long believed that high-resolution audio is snake oil sold to gullible people who, by amazing coincidence, also have exceedingly deep pockets. Magician James Randi likened some of the claims made by audiophiles as akin to paranormal events, and put up a prize of $1m to anyone who could prove them. (It went unclaimed, and now he's dead, so hey.) Anyway, Sony have launched this hi-res Walkman which, unlike their signature series ZM2 (£3,000) is priced at a mere £349. You still won't be able to tell the difference between 24- and 16-bit audio, but at least you won't have been fleeced.
www.sony.com

PITTSBURGH MODULAR TAIGA

Modular synthesis is another potentially expensive hobby, where can you find yourself lusting after the ultimate ratcheting envelope generator or dual attenuverter, and going without takeaways to buy them. Pittsburgh Modular are renowned for cramming lots of exquisite electronics into a single compact unit, and their latest instrument has been described as "what might have been dreamed up if Bob Moog and Don Buchla collaborated on a synth in the 70s," which is praise indeed. Head to YouTube to hear this beautiful thing in all its chunky, resonant glory.
www.pittsburghmodular.com

GUITAR OF CANS

Every year or so, artist and luthier Burls Art comes up with a striking idea for a guitar which catches the popular imagination. In 2019 it was 1,200 coloured pencils, last year it was plastic waste from the Atlantic, and now he's continuing the ecological theme with this guitar made out of 1,000 aluminium cans, set aside over the course of a year from barbecues, picnics and parties. The finished product took a hell of a lot of sanding, and it weighs over 12lbs, so you'll want to sit to play it. Crucially, it sounds as delicious as any guitar made of alder or mahogany.
www.burlsart.com

MY PROG HERO

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PRESS/VIRGIN/THE DUKES OF STRATOSPHEARS

Psyched! Black Star Rider Ricky Warwick (inset) loves XTC side band, The Dukes Of Stratosphear.

PRESS/ROSS HALFIN

RICKY WARWICK

The Black Star Riders frontman on the brilliance of **...Trail Of Dead** and psychedelic XTC spin-off, **The Dukes Of Stratosphear**.

"Growing up I knew Genesis because their singles were on the radio and I liked them, and as for Pink Floyd, you can't deny the greatness of that band. But anything over five minutes long tends to give me a nosebleed! If we're going prog, or proggish, then psychedelia's where I get my kicks. I've taken my fair share of acid and mushrooms, and for me psychedelia's about the 13th Floor Elevators, The Beatles from *Revolver* onwards, The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*.

I discovered ...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead online. The genius of them! The songwriting's great, there's so many styles and hooks that just bring you in. And there's a lot of aggression there — being an old punk that appeals to me.

The Century Of Self is a really great record, and their latest one, *XI: Bleed Here Now*, is absolutely fantastic. I'm all about songs — I get lost when things start to meander a bit too much for the sake of it, but they don't do that. They go into a great new part or segment, and you're like, 'Where did *that* come from?!'

I'm a massive XTC fan — Andy Partridge and Colin Moulding are quintessential English songwriters, and Dave Gregory's just a brilliant guitarist. In the 90s I got turned on to The Dukes Of Stratosphear, who basically were XTC.

I got [1985 debut EP] *25 O'Clock* and loved it. I think they recorded it in about two weeks with [producer] John Leckie for a joke, but it's just brilliant. Everything's in there — The Beatles, The Beach Boys, Syd Barrett-era Floyd. I love its British psychedelia vibe — the young girl narrating all this crazy stuff that doesn't really make sense, and the fact they gave themselves pseudonyms — Andy Partridge was Sir John Johns, Colin Moulding was The Red Curtain, Dave Gregory was Lord Cornelius Plum [laughs].

The Mole From The Ministry is a classic (the video's hilarious), and second album *Psonic Psunspot* [1987] is great too. *Vanishing Girl* is one of the greatest psychedelic pop songs ever in my opinion, and should have been a massive worldwide hit. It's all taken to the Nth degree, and done phenomenally well." **GRM**

"I'm all about songs - anything over five minutes gives me a nosebleed!"

Wrong Side Of Paradise is out now on Earache. See www.blackstarriders.com.

PROG IN BRIEF

PRESS/DANA TRIPPE

Kevin Parker's neo-psych champs **Tame Impala** (right) reissue their superb second album, 2012's *Lonerism*, on May 26 via Fiction. The three-LP, 10th anniversary box set comes with 24-page booklet and bonus material galore. Pre-orders at www.bit.ly/tamelonerism.

Further to our story last month, **Soft Machine** have confirmed that their upcoming studio album will be called *Other Doors*. It'll be released on June 30 through Dyad in the UK; MoonJune will do the honours in the US. More info at www.softmachine.org.

Manchester's indie synth proggers **Dutch Uncles** release their sixth LP, *True Entertainment*, on March 10 via Memphis Industries. Their guests include members of Metronomy and Everything Everything. Much more at www.dutchuncles.co.uk.

MOUNDRAG

Heavy sounds from French brothers-in-prog with no strings attached!

"WE MAY BE the only band in France that plays with just an organ and drums," says Colin Goallen, drummer of the Reine-based hard progressive psych duo Moundrag. "For many people, the first time they hear us, it's a real shock!"

Having released their debut album, *Hic Sunt Moundrages*, last October, Moundrag — aka brothers Colin and Camille — make an extraordinary racket augmented by the mighty timbre of the Hammond organ and their duelling harmony vocals. They're two men with a fondness for the Devil's interval and their unholy noise could wake the dead.

"People think they're hearing lots of instruments," adds Colin, "but there's no guitar or bass; it's just the distortion of the organ with pedals and a lot of amps."

Does Colin's brother Camille, Brittany's leading Hammond organ practitioner, make his cacophony with the aid of the foot pedals you get on church organs?

"No, I play the bass with my left hand like Ray Manzarek used to do," says Camille. "The first time I saw The Doors playing on YouTube, I said to myself, 'I can do this.'"

The Goallen brothers were members of local boogie rockers Smooth Motion before the lead singer decided to go travelling. Moundrag consciously uncoupled themselves from that band and discovered they could make a far more formidable noise with just the two of them.

France has gifted the world yé-yé and the French touch, though there are few outfits across La Manche whose primary influence is Deep Purple. But then the Goallens feel more Breton than French anyway, as proud Celts who grew up on Arthurian legend, and we're talking King Arthur rather than the Crazy World Of Arthur Brown. Though it turns out, they're avowed fans of organist Vincent Crane too. "I loved him in Atomic Rooster!" says Camille.

Their adoration of British bands came from their Irish uncle, a mentor figure who helped teach them how to play their instruments. He handed the boys a tape of Deep Purple's *Made In Japan* when they were just kids.

"It was mind blowing for us," says Camille, with a sense of awe.

"It's like our bible," adds Colin with a whisper.

Made In Japan includes a 20-minute rendition of *Space Truckin'* on the B-side, and accordingly, Moundrag have made their own 20-minute epic, *La Poule*, for the flipside of their debut, which twists and turns like a baby chicken on a spit.

"We grew up listening to albums by ELP and Yes," says Camille, "and there was always a big song on side two. We wanted to create a long song with orchestral parts like they used to do in the 70s."

As for the title, *Hic Sunt Moundrages*, it's a play on the Latin phrase 'hic sunt dracones' or 'here be dragons', and Camille and Colin aren't averse to silly nomenclature. In Smooth Motion they used to go by the aliases Organ Theory and Dr Mad Drum.

"I will tell you the truth," titters Camille, sounding slightly embarrassed, "we'd been drinking beer…"

"I gave myself that name because I just love the playing of Keith Moon," adds Colin. "He was the main Dr Mad Drum on Earth." **JA**

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Colin Goallen *(drums)*, **Camille Goallen** *(organ)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Deep Purple if they were a fearsome two-piece from Brittany and Ritchie Blackmore had gone awol travelling

CURRENT RELEASE

Hic Sunt Moundrages is out now via Dionysiac Records

WEBSITE

www.moundrag.bandcamp.com

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
Listen to MOUNDRAG all this month on PROGZILLA RADIO
progzilla.com/listen/

"People think they're hearing lots of instruments but it's just the organ."

Look, ma, no guitar! Camille (behind) and Colin Goallen.

PRESS/THÉO GOSSELIN

PINK FLOYD'S ENDLESS RIVER... OF BILE

A *Prog* reader asks if there will ever be oil on these Waters?

While my own personal jury is still out on whether I want to hear Roger Waters' revisited recording of *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, it's really hard to feel warm and fuzzy about the guy when he spews out the kind of opinions he did in February.

The news of the re-recording emerged in an interview with *The Telegraph*'s Tristram Fane Saunders, during which Waters emphasised his lead role in the writing of that classic 1973 album, saying of his former bandmates: "They are not artists! They have no ideas, not a single one between them." While conceding that Nick Mason "never pretended", Waters also opined that David Gilmour and the late Rick Wright "can't write songs".

Creative artists from Taylor Swift to George Lucas have gone back to have another go at or add to something they created long ago, but what Roger Waters is on about – as much in his solo stab at that seminal Floyd album as in what he's said about the other members – has me stumped.

Levelling the opinion that Gilmour and Wright are/were not artists and could not write songs is just plain silly. We have to believe Water knows better, no? It's just the guy's attempt at being as cantankerous as he always has been, isn't it?

There was the infamous lawsuit Waters brought against Gilmour and company to not use the Pink Floyd name in their endeavours without him (which Waters lost). There was the 'who did what' argument over the band's *Animals* re-release and the album's liner notes. And then, more recently, there was Waters addressing the UN on the subject of the war in Ukraine, and what Gilmour's wife Polly Samson had to say about his remarks [she called him, among other things, a "Putin apologist"]. It all seems to have been prompted by Roger Waters' less than genial attitude.

What we love(d) about Waters is his jaundiced view of things and certainly his fine lyric writing. What we love(d) about Gilmour is his sweet vocals, guitar prowess and the musical counter he gave to Waters' writing. What we love(d) about Nick Mason is his laconic drumming and his seeming ability to handle both Waters and Gilmour. And what we loved about Rick Wright were his vocals, the subtle jazz-flavoured touches in his keyboard playing, and his singular songwriting moments.

Many fans have enjoyed the music that came from the Waters-less Pink Floyd, and many have also enjoyed Roger Waters' solo output, but it's not hard to hold the opinion it all pales in comparison to that released during Pink Floyd's 70s heyday. It's pretty safe to say at this point that we shan't see Waters and Gilmour teaming up to produce new Floyd music any time soon. We could just as easily agree that Pink Floyd all but died with Rick Wright (one-off singles for Ukraine notwithstanding).

So the best thing for us fans to do is enjoy the music these four guys made, together. No matter what they say or do about that music now. And no matter what they say about each other.

RALPH GRECO, JR.

Got an opinion on the matter that you'd like to share? Please email us at: prog@futurenet.com. Opinions expressed in this column aren't necessarily those of the magazine.

ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog

Hungarians with *Flare*: Shell Beach.

PRESS/NIKI KARAGIANNI

SHELL BEACH

The rising, genre-straddling Hungarian quintet with a familial tie to one of their country's rock music giants.

"We have a lot of great new bands here in Budapest," Shell Beach guitarist Pali Somló tells *Prog*, "but I think you can put most of them into a genre - some are indie rock bands, others heavy metal — I think they're still trying to copy their favourites."

If that's true, then Somló's band are unlike any other in their hometown. Their marketing labels them as both experimental rock and post-hardcore, for fans of shoegazey alt-rockers Deftones and ambient proggers The Contortionist alike. Nobody really knows what box to put them in.

"We come from a lot of different influences, which is why we're not mainstream," says Somló with a laugh. "Our guitarist [Viktor Sagi] is the best jazz guitarist in Hungary, our bassist [Matyas Mohacsi] is a grunge guy, and our drummer [Daniel Szalay] is the prog fan in the band. This is why we sound colourful and have very different types of songs."

Out now on Wild Thing Records, Shell Beach's new LP, *Solar Flare*, brings off-kilter prog anthems and soul interludes, with polyrhythmic drums, big melodic vocal lines from Zoltan Bodóczy and Somló and Sagi's callous-shredding guitar chops. An important aspect of the band's story is represented by the song *Olyan Szépek Voltunk*. It's a cover of a tune by Pali's famous late father Tamás Somló, the singer and bassist for Hungarian rock group, Locomotiv GT.

"My father was the most famous musician here in the 1970s," says the guitarist. "His band were the Led Zeppelin of Hungary. I was born into a musical family and music's been a part of my life since childhood. Unfortunately, my father died six years ago. After that, for a couple years, I didn't write anything."

The music on *Solar Flare* was the first thing Somló composed since his dad's death, and the album's dedicated to his memory.

Pali says Shell Beach have some gigs planned in the UK: "That's a big achievement for us, and we're gonna try and go for an Australian tour as well. This record deserves a proper tour, not only in Hungary, but all around the world!" **MM**

"We have a lot of influences, which is why we're not mainstream!"

More info on the band at www.shellbeachband.com.

PROG IN BRIEF

PRESS/NICK HODGSON

Prog Award-winning cellist **Jo Quail** (right) will go on her first headline tour in May. The seven-show run starts in Southampton on May 8 (the day after her slot at London's Desertfest), and concludes in Glasgow on 14. More at www.joquail.co.uk.

Sourced from **Steve Hillage**'s personal archive, the self-explanatory *LA Forum 31.1.77* is out on Madfish on March 17, and captures the guitar god in action while touring the States with ELO that year. More on this (and his '23 tour) at www.stevehillage.com.

Pond frontman Nicholas Allbrook has announced his new solo album, *Manganese*, is out on June 9 via Spinning Top Records. It's his fourth record outside the Australian band's banks, and features current single, *Jackie*. More at www.nicholasallbrook.com.

Colloseum, **Curved Air** and **The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown** are among the bands set to play the Nene Valley Rock Festival, Peterborough, due to take place August 31 to September 2. For more info on this crowdfunded event go to www.nvrf.rocks.

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
Listen to EBB all this month on PROGZILLA RADIO
progzilla.com/listen/

PRESS/BOUDICCA RECORDS

Shared dreams, EBB. L-R: Kitty Biscuits, Anna Fraser, Suna Dasi, Erin Bennett, Bad Dog, Nikki Francis.

EBB

Gutsy, authentic and multifaceted rock from these Scottish proggers.

FOR MANY BANDS, living communally is part of the rock'n'roll dream — for EBB it's simply what they do and an important element of their shared identity. Wintering in their base, an arts collective in rural Scotland, lead singer and guitarist Erin Bennett, Kitty Biscuits (percussion, backing vocals) and producer-bassist Finn McGregor (aka Bad Dog) bask in the warmth of the hugely positive reception for current album, *Mad & Killing Time*. Its central tale of how love can be found between the most unexpected people in the most bizarre circumstances is told through a winning combination of eclectic storytelling and strong songwriting.

"God, we've had incredible receptions from various different online and print publications; good, great, really killer reviews," Bennett enthuses. "People have really listened to it from beginning to end, which is what we wanted. It's like a film that takes you on a journey," continues Biscuits.

Although EBB's official recording career covers barely three years, the band share connections that go back much further. Initially finding common cause personally and musically after an accidental meeting in the US in 2005, they formed strong bonds as friends and collaborators in various combinations over the next few years.

A personal tragedy ultimately forged the present band, when Jo Heeley, Bennett's civil partner and bandmate in folk rock trio Syren, passed away after a short illness in 2012. "When Jo died it was just appalling and [Erin] went down like the Titanic," reflects McGregor. "And we formed the Erin Bennett Band around her to kind of get her going."

Although Bennett continued writing and performing, the evolution into EBB was marked by 2019's *Death & The Maiden* EP and fully bloomed during lockdown. "We completely smashed that [backing band] model, we were locked down together... and played for 18 months," says Bennett.

"It was very much about live jamming and the prog," agrees McGregor.

That prog derives from the rich and varied influences and experiences of EBB's members, which include folk, classical, performance art, shock rock and poetry or "symbiotic twins of American classic music and European innovation and eccentricity," suggests Biscuits.

Plans for this year will invariably include more gigging. "We're going back on tour again to promote the album. We've got a number of dates, some of which we can't reveal just yet," teases Bennett.

"We just want to get out and play live. There's an energy and feedback, which we need as artists," Biscuits adds. However, being a majority female band, gigging has thrown up issues with punters, for instance, assuming they must use backing tapes to produce their live performances. Thankfully, as Bennett is quick to observe, "In the last year or so, we've had an awful lot more respect and good nature than we have had previously."

New material is also on the horizon, but what might the band use as subject matter? Kitty Biscuits has already decided, "Death, life, agony and love! And lots of hummingbirds and aquatic, amorphous, iridescent creatures!" Of course. **GMM**

"In the last year or so, we've had more respect and good nature than previously."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Kitty Biscuits *(percussion, backing vocals, spoken word),* **Anna Fraser** *(drums, percussion),* **Bad Dog** *(bass),* **Suna Dasi** *(synths, backing vocals),* **Erin Bennett** *(guitars, lead vocals, trumpet),* **Nikki Francis** *(keyboards, woodwind)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Late-70s Heart gone prog, channelling a gritty, earthier early King Crimson

CURRENT RELEASE

Mad & Killing Time is out now on Boudicca Records

WEBSITE

www.ebbband.com

Official Progressive Albums Chart

The prog top 30 albums

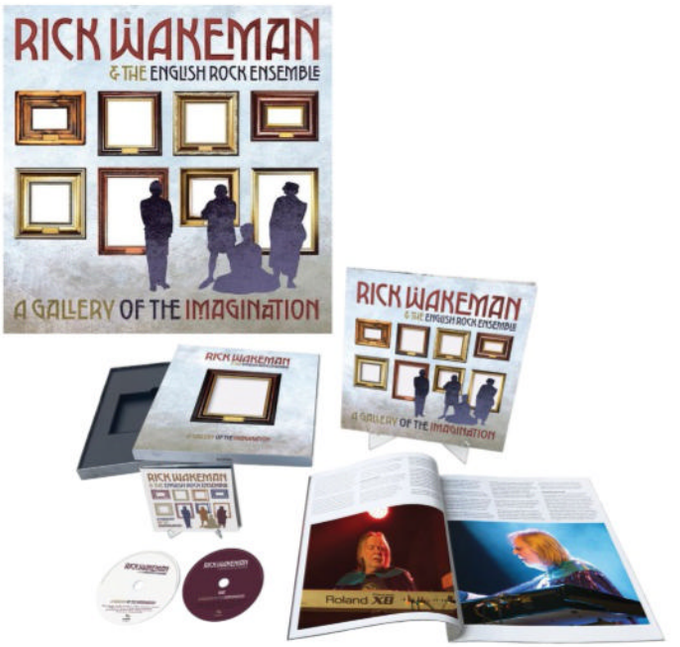
February 2023

Compiled by Official Charts Company

1	**RIVERSIDE**	ID.Entity *(INSIDEOUT)*
2	**MUSE**	Will Of The People *(WARNER/HELIUM-3)*
3	**KATATONIA**	Sky Void Of Stars *(NAPALM)*
4	**PINK FLOYD**	Animals (2018 Remix) *(PINK FLOYD RECORDS/RHINO)*
5	**10CC**	The Things We Do For Love: The Ultimate Hits And Beyond *(XPLODED MUSIC)*
6	**POLYPHIA**	Remember That You Will Die *(RISE)*
7	**TAME IMPALA**	The Slow Rush – B Sides & Remixes *(FICTION)*
8	**RUSH**	Moving Pictures *(UMC/VIRGIN)*
9	**ROGER WATERS**	The Lockdown Sessions *(LEGACY RECORDINGS)*
10	**BLACK MIDI**	Hellfire *(ROUGH TRADE)*
11	**HAWKWIND**	We Are Looking In On You *(CHERRY RED)*
12	**PINK FLOYD**	Alternative Tracks 1972 *(PINK FLOYD RECORDS)*
13	**THRESHOLD**	Dividing Lines *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
14	**PORCUPINE TREE**	Closure/Continuation *(MUSIC FOR NATIONS)*
15	**JETHRO TULL**	The Zealot Gene *(INSIDEOUT)*
16	**BRIAN ENO**	Foreverandevernomore *(UNIVERSAL)*
17	**WARDRUNA**	Kvitravn – The First Flight Of The White Raven *(MUSIC FOR NATIONS)*
18	**JEAN-MICHEL JARRE**	Oxymore *(RCA)*
19	**MARILLION**	An Hour Before It's Dark *(EARMUSIC)*
20	**COHEED AND CAMBRIA**	Vaxis II – A Window Of The Waking Mind *(ROADRUNNER)*
21	**GOAT**	Oh Death *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
22	**KING GIZZARD & LIZARD WIZARD**	Omnium Gatherum *(KGLW)*
23	**FLAMING LIPS**	Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots *(WARNER)*
24	**DEVIN TOWNSEND**	Lightwork *(INSIDEOUT)*
25	**TARJA**	Best Of – Living The Dream *(EARMUSIC)*
26	**MOSTLY AUTUMN**	Back In These Arms – Live 2022 *(MOSTLY AUTUMN RECORDS)*
27	**KING GIZZARD & LIZARD WIZARD**	Ice, Death, Planets, Lungs, Mushrooms, And Lava *(KGLW)*
28	**MESHUGGAH**	Immutable *(ATOMIC FIRE)*
29	**KING GIZZARD & LIZARD WIZARD**	Changes *(KGLW)*
30	**STEVE HACKETT**	Genesis Revisited Live: Seconds Out & More *(INSIDEOUT)*

FIND OUT MORE AT **WWW.OFFICIALCHARTS.COM**

WIN! RICK WAKEMAN DELUXE SET



After the success of *The Red Planet*, Rick Wakeman & The English Rock Ensemble have returned with the softer and more melodic *A Gallery Of The Imagination*. To celebrate this new release we have a copy of the super deluxe box set to give away to one lucky reader.

The album explores the idea of painting with sound, something Wakeman was encouraged to do when he began taking piano lessons as a child. The 12 new tracks, which showcase vocalist Hayley Sanderson, conjure up what Wakeman refers to as a "music gallery" of sound via myriad styles and genres. The limited multimedia set provides different listening experiences with double vinyl and CD versions of the full album, as well as a DVD with surround sound audio and hi-res stereo mixes, and a 24-page perfect bound book. It's all packaged in an elegant box.

To be in with a chance of winning this brilliant prize, visit www.bit.ly/PROG138 and answer the following question:

***A Gallery Of The Imagination* includes vocals from Hayley Sanderson, but which competitive UK TV show is she best known for working on?**

a) *Britain's Got Talent*

b) *The Voice*

c) *Strictly Come Dancing*

For more information see www.rwcc.com.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from March 10-April 14, 2023. By entering you agree to our competition rules (available at www.futureplc.com/competition-rules). Entries limited to one per household regardless of the form of entry. Use of automated devices as methods of submission are not valid forms of entry. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition. The winner will be notified by Future by email after the closing date. If a winner has not responded after 28 days, an alternative winner will be drawn.

Now our turn...

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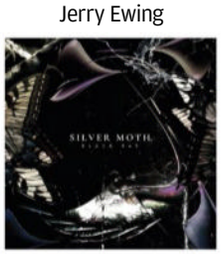		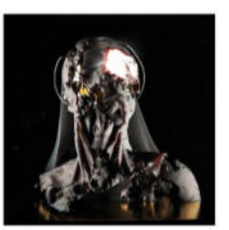			
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PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
Listen to CABIRIA all this month on PROGZILLA RADIO
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PRESS/STEPHEN PELLING

Lean Machine, Cabiria. L-R: Stu Harris, Rory Padfield, Kye Phillips.

CABIRIA

Epic and ambitious post-rockers… to the power of three.

JOINING THE VERITABLE host of excellent instrumental bands that have emerged over the last couple of decades, London-based Cabiria have been working hard to build their profile over the last three years. With a self-confidence bordering on hubris, the trio self-financed and self-released their debut album, the ambitious and expansive *Rust & Grey*, in 2021. Blending elements of post-rock and prog metal with brooding atmospherics and fragile ambiance, they even found space for the organ of Brecon Cathedral (courtesy of special guest Jon Pilgrim).

Although still in their mid 20s, the bandmates' self-assurance comes, in part, from working together over a number of years. "Me and Kye [Phillips, drums] have known each other since we were tiny," explains guitarist Rory Padfield from the band's recently installed home studio, "and we were the resident metalheads at secondary school, learning Metallica songs, Trivium songs, all that."

Padfield then met bassist Stu Harris at university: "Kye and I were in a thrash metal sort of band and we ended up getting Stu to play bass and we found out that we had a love for the same sort of music."

Drawing on initial influences such as Russian Circles and Toska, the band have concentrated on what works for them as a trio. "We've been working to strip away as much of the fat as possible and focus on writing in the room with each other, as opposed to having something that's sort of incoherent in a live context. Otherwise, it's just riffs and time signatures and technicalities," reflects Padfield. They've also taken on wider influences, as Padfield says, "There's a thriving jazz scene [in London] so we're trying to take as much from that as possible. We know a lot of singer-songwriters, a lot of folk artists… it's just trying to combine all that: melodies, harmonies and songs".

Did they become an instrumental project by accident or design? "It never crossed our minds to try to find [a vocalist] really. We wanted to write stuff that was for guitars, drums and bass," admits Harris.

Phillips expands on this, "We realised that it was super-fun and super-challenging. How can you engage someone who doesn't really listen to music without vocals?"

Although, as Padfield reveals, "Funnily enough, we're having vocals on the next record."

"Just for the one song!" clarifies Harris.

This leads conversation to the subject of that second album. "It's all written," Padfield states, with a tentative release around the start of this summer.

"It's more diverse [than *Rust & Grey*]. Our playing's probably got better as well. It's been another year of working with each other. Hopefully I'll be able to experiment a little bit on the drum kit and do stuff with sounds that we haven't done before," Phillips adds.

Guitarist Padfield is also looking at the sound palette: "One goal is to make stuff more colourful and work with different effects, textures, sounds, and a lot of making pedals do stuff they weren't supposed to do!" **GMM**

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Kye Phillips *(drums)*, **Stu Harris** *(bass)*, **Rory Padfield** *(guitar)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Russian Circles meets Rush at their noisiest amid cinematic, post-rock soundscapes

CURRENT RELEASE

Rust & Grey out now via Bandcamp

WEBSITE

www.cabiriaofficial.bandcamp.com

"There's a thriving jazz scene in London so we're trying to take as much from that as possible."

THE ALAN PARSONS PROJECT
'THE TURN OF A FRIENDLY CARD'
(3CD/BLU RAY LIMITED EDITION BOX SET)

- This new deluxe edition comprises 3CDs and a Blu-Ray disc (Region Free) with an additional 42 tracks drawn from Eric Woolfson's song-writing diaries, studio session out-takes and a stunning new 5.1 surround sound mix by Alan Parsons and a high resolution remastered original stereo mix, along with the promotional videos of 'Games People Play', 'The Gold Bug' and 'The Turn Of A Friendly Card' plus a promotional television advertisement.
- This stunning set also features a lavish illustrated book with a new essay with photos, memorabilia and features recollections from Alan Parsons and Sally Woolfson. It also includes a reproduction poster.
- Date 24th February 2023

HAWKWIND
'DAYS OF THE UNDERGROUND – THE STUDIO & LIVE RECORDINGS 1977-1979 '
(10 DISC BOX SET)

- Newly mixed from the original multi-track tapes, these performances feature many previously unreleased tracks.
- Release Date 31st March 2023

- This boxed set features stunning new 5.1 Surround Sound and Stereo remixes of these albums by Steven Wilson and also includes a host of rare studio out-takes from the time. Significantly, the set gathers together new mixes of all the surviving live recordings made on the band's September 1977 tour, the Sonic Assassins concert in December 1977 and a Hawklords' concert from November 1978.

VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR
'THE BATH FORUM CONCERT'
(2CD, BLU RAY & DVD BOX SET (4 DISC))

- 'The Bath Forum Concert' is the first live CD and film fully controlled by the band and it captures Peter Hammill, Hugh Banton and Guy Evans at their finest performing vintage tracks such as 'Masks', 'Childlike Faith In Childhoods End', 'La Rossa', 'Man Erg' and 'House With No Door' along with newer pieces such as 'Interference Patterns', 'Every Bloody Emperor', 'Go', 'Alfa Berlina' and 'Room 1210'.
- This release features the entire concert, mixed by Stephen W Tayler, and includes two CDs and a region free High-Definition Blu Ray video with 5.1 Surround Sound and an NTSC / Region Free DVD of this stunning concert film.
- Release Date 10th March 2023

JADE WARRIOR
'WIND BORNE – THE ISLAND ALBUMS 1974-1978'
(4 CD BOX SET)

- Jade Warrior's final album for Island Records, 'Way Of The Sun', was issued in 1978 and was arguably their finest album.
- An incredibly evocative work, inspired by the mythology of the Incas, the album saw Field and Duhig at the peak of their creative powers.
- 'Wind Borne – The Island Albums 1974 – 1978' has been newly remastered from the original master tapes and is a fine collection of truly innovative and beautiful music by Britain's foremost pioneering progressive rock duo.
- Release Date 31st March 2023

BARCLAY JAMES HARVEST
'ONCE AGAIN'
(3CD/BLU-RAY REMASTERED & EXPANDED EDITION)

- A new 3 CD/1 Blu Ray remastered boxed set edition of the classic Barclay James Harvest album.
- Featuring a new remaster of the original album mix, along with new 5.1 Surround sound and stereo mixes by Stephen W. Tayler.
- Plus a rare bbc john peel concert appearance from 1971, rare out-takes and the 1972 SQ Quadrophonic mix

STEPPENWOLF
'THE EPIC YEARS 1974-1976'
(3CD BOX SET)

- Following on from 'Magic Carpet Ride', Esoteric's acclaimed boxed set of the first era of Steppenwolf's career, 'The Epic Years 1974-1976' gathers together all of these albums, along with two rare bonus tracks.
- The set also includes an illustrated booklet with a new essay by Steppenwolf aficionado Jim Christopulos.

Esoteric Recordings Remastering and Expanding the Classics

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A band for all seasons, Wizrd. L-R: Karl Bjorå, Hallvard Gaardløs, Vegard Lien Bjerkan, Axel Skalstad.

PRESS/ROLAND FOTO

WIZRD

Soft Ffog and Krokofant musicians team up for unpredictable prog-psych joy.

INCREASINGLY ONE OF Northern Europe's most prog-friendly creative epicentres, Oslo has become a hotbed of strange and exciting bands. Wizrd may be the most exhilarating of the lot. With a sound that unfolds from some unexplored midpoint between psychedelic prog, jazz fusion and angular avant-rock, with sumptuous three-part vocal harmonies erupting from every wonky corner, the Norwegians appear all-encompassing and all-conquering on their debut, *Seasons*. But as bassist-vocalist Hallvard Gaardløs explains, Wizrd began life as a slightly more prosaic component of his end-of-term exams.

"The origin of the band was that we went to the Jazz Conservatory in Trondheim together, and I actually founded the band for my graduating exam," he grins. "It was me and Karl [Bjorå, guitarist] and Axel [Skalstad, drummer] and we played at the exam, including some songs that wound up on the album! I always wanted to have keyboards in the band, so I'm not quite sure why I didn't ask Vegard [Lien Bjerkan, keyboardist] to join in, but he joined pretty soon after. I just wanted to merge rock and jazz. Rock is my roots, that's where I'm from, but we also had this interest in jazz, improv music and experimental music, and we wanted to fuse those things into one."

With a line-up that features members of Krokofant, Soft Ffog, Draken, Megalodon Collective and several more off-beam Oslo acts, it should come as no surprise that Wizrd's *Seasons* seldom stands still. Rich with melody and bursts of rock'n'roll fervour, but also heroically unpredictable, songs such as the wild, propulsive *Free Will* and the absurdly catchy *Show Me What You Got* speak of a band with a widescreen, anything-goes vision.

"I think you can maybe call it planned chaos," says Gaardløs. "I don't think we really plan anything that much, so it's a natural consequence of the four of us together. We have some common ground musically, but we're also completely all over the place. We combine the different musical areas that we come from, and we use that as a strength instead of trying to hide it."

A work in progress since 2020, Wizrd's debut was produced by Martin Horntveth, drummer with Norwegian alt-jazz legends Jaga Jazzist — significant architects of the vibrant, free-thinking music scene that has developed in Oslo over the last two decades. For Gaardløs and his Wizrd comrades, the collaboration was a pleasure.

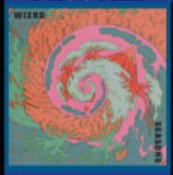
"We've known Martin for a long time so it felt kind of natural, but I've been listening to Jaga Jazzist since high school, you know? If you'd told me 15 years ago that I'd end up in the studio working with him I would have said, 'No fucking way!' [Laughs] Martin is so energetic and has so many ideas. He's like a one-man storm of creativity."

One thing that comes across very strongly during *Seasons* is that Wizrd are, at heart, a vibrant, high-energy live band. Despite all being exceptionally busy with 1,001 other projects, Gaardløs seems confident that the chemistry they share will be enough to push this post-exam project to the top of everyone's agendas.

"Yeah, we all play in a lot of bands, and none of us can make a living out of Wizrd alone," he concludes. "But the main motivation is that we love making music together. Playing live together is something special. We're already working on our second album, so there is more music to come for sure." **DL**

"If you'd told me I'd end up working with Jaga Jazzist's drummer I'd have said, 'No fucking way!'"

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Hallvard Gaardløs *(bass, vocals)*, **Karl Bjorå** *(guitar, vocals)*, **Vegard Lien Bjerkan** *(keyboards, vocals)*, **Axel Skalstad** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Jazz rock, angular prog and rootsy psych collide, with harmony vox galore

CURRENT RELEASE

Seasons is out now via Karisma

WEBSITE

wizrd.bandcamp.com

Q&A

JAH WOBBLE

The endlessly creative bassist ruminates on how London still inspires him to write and why compilations of his work won't please everyone – least of all himself.

Words: Julian Marszałek **Portrait:** Alex Hurst

With new, major projects in the pipeline, John Joseph Wardle, aka Jah Wobble, has been harnessing the power of portable digital tools and the internet to celebrate his former hometown of London. Eschewing traditional business and distribution models, *The Bus Routes Of South London*, his latest digital-only release, was uploaded to the music distribution platform Bandcamp just 30 minutes after it was completed.

Arguably best known as the co-founder of post-punk pioneers Public Image Ltd with singer John Lydon and guitarist Keith Levene, Wobble has forged a singular career of his own and, in the process, has elevated his instrument of choice to centre stage. In a career spanning more than four decades and participating in genres as wide as world music, dance, ambient and industrial rock, this most progressive of bassists ploughs a furrow that is uniquely his own.

How did the idea of the *The Bus Routes Of South London* album come about?
I was asked to do a talk at Dulwich library and I took the 176. It was a long old journey and I had my iPad with me, so I wrote a thing called *South London Symphony* on the bus. With this one, I just ended up taking more buses. I'm down in London a lot and it slowly dawned on me that you could do a project as that.

There was a train strike and I had to get a couple of buses back to west London. I was the only person on the top and I took a photograph, which is now the front cover. I put it up on Twitter and loads of people liked it. And that's when I thought, "Yeah, this could be a project."

"John Lydon's a populist guy now. Who'd have thought he'd have gone down that kind of route?"

How did you choose the bus routes that inspired the material?
They're mainly the ones I use. When I was based in London, the bus I took the most was the number 11: Liverpool Street to Fulham Broadway and so I used to get that a lot and it's a long route. Most people wouldn't do that but I do when I see Tottenham [Hotspur] play.

How did the compositional process work?
Sometimes I used voice memos to hum tunes into. Sometimes with lyrics, if you don't put them down, you might not remember them. But I've got the apps where you can write your melody lines and your chords. It generally starts with a sort of tempo more than anything. And changes in mood sometimes make you feel a weird, chordal change; you suddenly just feel you're in some darker energy field or something. I've always felt that with London.

Given your experience working on the London Underground, don't you feel inspired to approach that as a future project?
It's crossed my mind a few times over the years to get back at the front of the tubes just as an observer [Wobble previously worked on the Tube]. And actually maybe do a little film and put music to it for the London Underground, like a promotional thing. I have a lot of affinity and affection for the Underground.

You live in Stockport [in Greater Manchester] but, as evidenced by this album and *Thames Symphony*, you still have an affinity for London.
I love it up here, but I'm in London as much as up here and I'm very much a Londoner. I'm still deeply attached to London; it surprises me how much. I've got friends who left London and they say, "I fucking hate going back because you can feel like a ghost." But feeling like a ghost isn't bad because if you're a ghost you kind of float about, you know?

You're also about to release the *Dark Luminosity – The 21st Century Collection* box set through Cherry Red. Given the sheer scope of your recorded career, what were the criteria for material to be included?
[Cherry Red's Director Of Catalogue] John Reed started the first list just to get it going. And then I ended up going, "You can't put that on there – it's crap! Why is that on there?" and all that. So then I got involved. It was a big job.

Then you just have to go, "Get the job done. Don't get too precious about it." And it's already happened since it was signed off – I've come across tracks I forgot about: "That was brilliant! That should have been on there!" But, of course, John goes, "Look, you can't put them all on there. We're up to 77 minutes on every CD!" It won't be a perfect collection but I'm pretty sure it's still pretty representative.

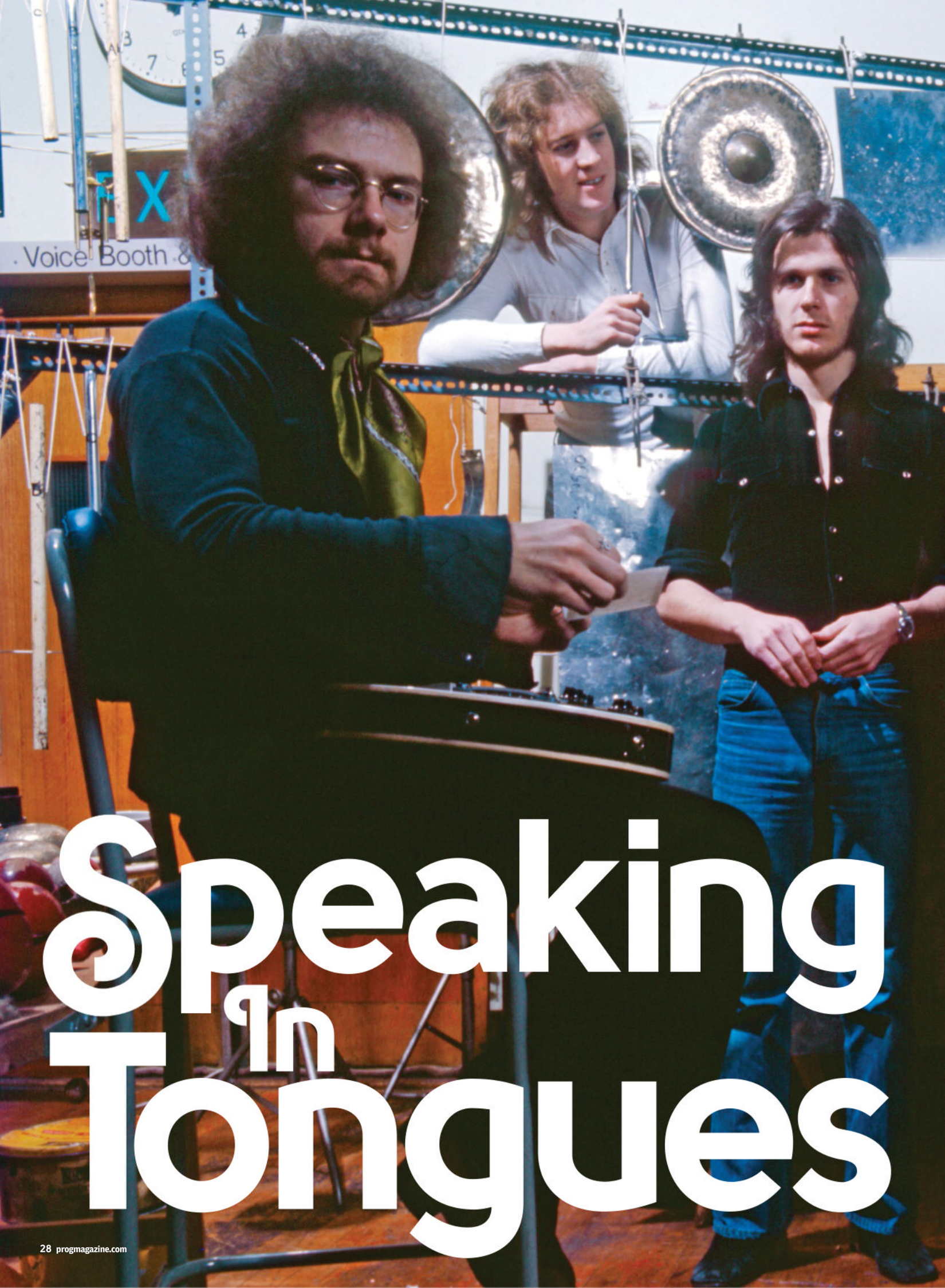
What was the last recording session that made you feel truly happy?
Oh, whatever the last thing I did, to be honest. I'm always in ecstasy with it. And I think the reason for that is, it doesn't necessarily mean it's any good according to the world; what it means is, I'm happy because it's what I do. And I'm not working to order. But you know what? It was probably *The Bus Routes Of South London*. I finished it and put it out on Bandcamp a half-hour later.

Have you ever fancied writing a Eurovision song yourself?
[Joking] How dare you! That's the thing you do at the end of your career when you're desperate! [Laughs] My wife suggested I do it but I try to avoid mainstream stuff. It's like trying to attack Moscow: you'll get bogged down and it'll go wrong and it'll be a misery, you know? And so I didn't do it.

And then I saw John Lydon has done it. He's a very populist guy now. Between 1975 and 1982, he looked amazing and the lyrics he wrote were like Samuel Beckett. Who'd have thought he'd have gone down that kind of route now? It's like watching *Black Mirror*!

You're something of a serial collaborator. Who have you not worked with that you'd like to?
Whoever comes into my field of consciousness; that'll do me. I'm not too bothered with any ambition in that respect. I'm 65 this year and I take it one day at a time.

The Bus Routes Of South London is out now via Bandcamp, and Dark Luminosity – The 21st Century Collection is out via Cherry Red on April 21. See jahwobble.bandcamp.com and www.cherryred.co.uk for more.



Speaking In Tongues

"If your version of rock music is sex, drugs and rock'n'roll, or three chords and the truth, there isn't an awful lot of that on *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*."
Bill Bruford

In 1973, **King Crimson** released what would become their classic fifth album. *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* marked the beginning of a new era for the band, who welcomed not only a revised line-up but also a more dynamic sound compared to their earlier releases. *Prog* looks back on the making of a record that would steer the group into uncharted musical waters.

Words: Mike Barnes **Image:** DGM Archive/Willie Christie

A new Crimson dawn. L-R: Robert Fripp, David Cross, John Wetton, Jamie Muir, Bill Bruford.

By April 1972 King Crimson were in serious disarray. The group who had caused such a stir in 1969 with their live shows and their debut album – the epochal progressive rock statement *In The Court Of The Crimson King* – had gone through three line-up changes for each of their three subsequent and sporadically brilliant studio albums: *In The Wake Of Poseidon*, *Lizard* and *Islands*. But what had once looked like the most promising band of the early 70s now appeared to be the most unstable. King Crimson had, it seemed, essentially ceased to exist.

Guitarist Robert Fripp's uneasy artistic relationship with lyricist and co-founder Peter Sinfield had ended. Fripp explained to Richard Williams of *Melody Maker* that he "didn't feel that by continuing to work together we could improve on what we had already done". And the line-up that had recorded *Islands* and toured the US

in 1971 was falling apart. Another US tour had been booked and they flew out in January to fulfil their contractual obligations, but on their return in April the break-up was made official.

No one but the most gifted seer could have predicted then that within a year a new version of the group would release an album, *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*, which would not only be the equal of their debut, but one of the most audacious, inventive and imaginative albums in the whole of 70s progressive rock.

Even before the break-up, disgruntled *Melody Maker* reader Fred Foster had written in to the paper complaining that the most recent King Crimson line-up, "had no more right to the name KC than Emerson, Lake & Palmer and McDonald and Giles". He added, "To simply give the new group a new name would clear the confusion by showing that Crimson is dead."

join the group. But it was of no surprise to Bruford, who had been a fan since their earliest days.

"I played fairly easy to get," Bruford now admits to *Prog*, "I kind of stuck myself in front of Robert and said, 'I'm here.' Yes and King Crimson had played together on the same bill [in the US in 1972], but for several months it was, 'Not yet, Bill', and then eventually it was, 'Okay, Bill, let's do this', as if I had been a tomato ripening upon the vine ready to burst forth with goodness.

"I was thrilled to be part of it, although I'm not sure I really knew what I was getting myself into. I didn't know Robert very well. I just jumped in and hoped for the best. I don't mind doing that, but of course it can go wildly wrong."

The *Melody Maker* gossip column 'The Raver' from August 5, 1972 included this entry: "Bill Bruford quitting Yes was strange timing...

"The reason why we were different was that we were prepared to jump off the cliff."
John Wetton

Mr Foster was closer to the truth than he'd realised. Unbeknown to the public, Fripp had started playing in a trio with violinist and keyboardist David Cross, who he'd seen play with Waves — and who had been trying to get a deal with EG, the company that managed Crimson — and percussionist Jamie Muir. Fripp's initial idea was to record a raga-style improvised album and the trio had played together at Muir's house in Highbury, London.

"That was all fantastic," Cross tells *Prog*, "but I didn't join a pre-existing band called King Crimson. It never had a name beyond 'Indian-style improvisation album'. Robert probably wouldn't have had the support of his manager if he had done something like that. Then something shifted, whereby he put the two things together."

The original line-up of King Crimson had split up in December 1969, less than three months after the release of their debut album. In 2012, Fripp told this writer, "It was heart-breaking but there was still something there to be pursued and I knew that whatever we did in the next two years — this was Peter and myself — would be wrong. But we had to do it to get to the other side."

The "other side" that Fripp spoke of was the fifth incarnation of King Crimson. It was heralded in July 1972 by the surprise announcement that drummer Bill Bruford had quit Yes to

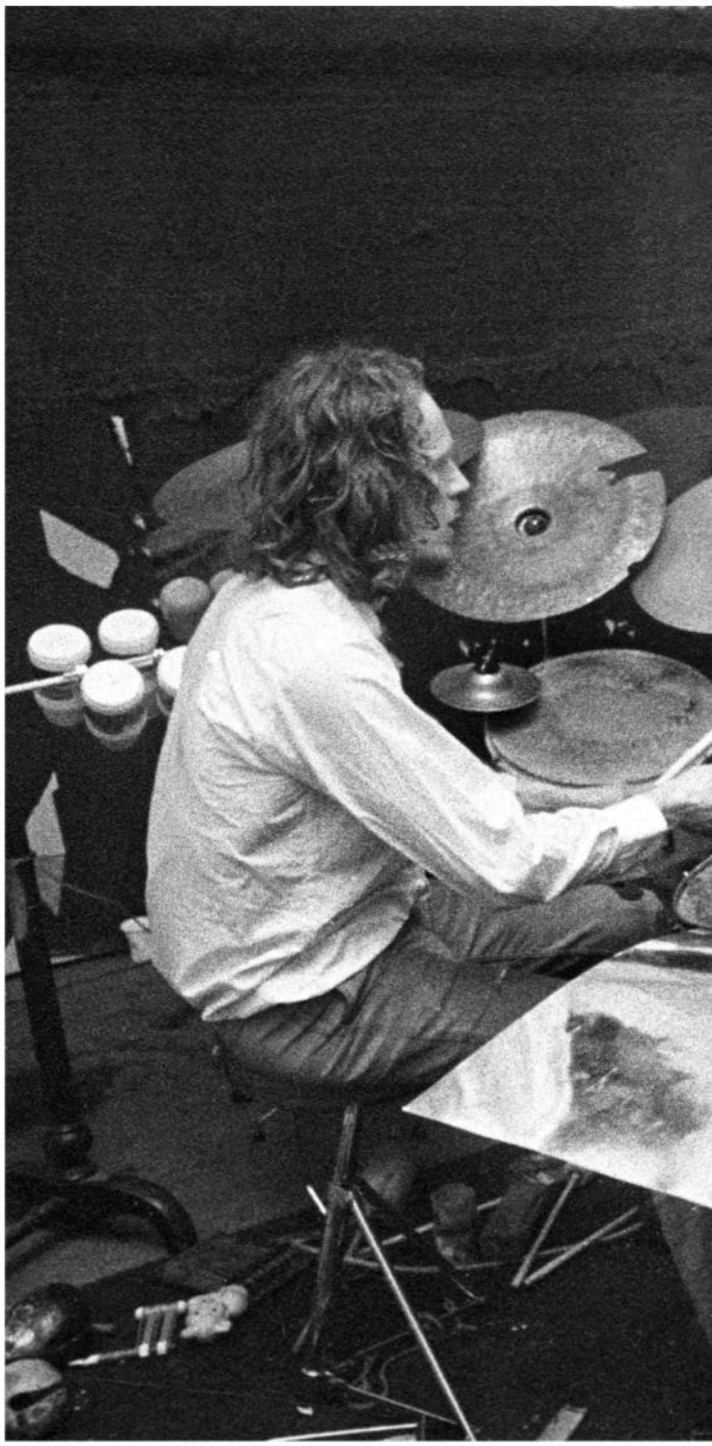
Gigs with KC don't exactly last, at least on present form."

Did Bruford share those sentiments in any way? "I didn't," he says. "I was a romantic, and saw the positive gloss over potential pitfalls. I was aware that I had done my best in Yes; it was time for a change. I thought Robert could provide a space where I could grow and learn, and I was right."

Fripp called on another well-known player and an old friend from Bournemouth: bass guitarist and vocalist John Wetton. Bruford had seen him on TV with Family and recognised him as one of the "bass players of the moment". Wetton had previously enquired about joining King Crimson in 1971, but bass guitarist and vocalist Boz Burrell had just been drafted in, so he joined Family instead.

"I saw the first King Crimson at The Marquee and the London College Of Printing in 1969," Wetton told this writer in 1997. "I thought they were outstanding in that they were so different from anything else, but you knew it was quality."

The unique element in the new line-up — as he would have been in any group — was Jamie Muir. He had recorded little aside from the self-titled album by Music Improvisation Company in 1970 with guitarist Derek Bailey and saxophonist Evan Parker, and had played in a more rock context with Pete Brown And The Battered



Ornaments, Boris and Assagai, where he met keyboard player Alan Gowen. He and Gowen teamed up with guitarist Allan Holdsworth in the short-lived Sunship, and Muir was then recommended to Fripp by journalist Richard Williams.

Although Muir had been drawn to improvised music for its intricacy and detail, he felt that from a distance it tended to assume a similar kind of shape. In an interview with Aymeric Leroy in 2000 Muir said that he had wanted "to make myself more predictable" with Sunship. But by the time he had become a member of King Crimson in the summer of 1972, it was debatable if that statement held up. Muir had amassed an enormous

BARRIE WENTZELL

The *Larks'* line-up (minus Wetton) meet up for their first informal rehearsal at Covent Garden in July 1972.

percussion setup. Looking like some strange art installation, it included a standard drum kit, rattles, bird calls, car horns, chimes, bells, gongs, metal sheets, tuned drums, plastic bottles, and other hitables too numerous to detail. And at a time when to be weird was cool, press shots of Muir leaning towards the camera grinning through a waxed moustache while playing a bowed saw piqued the interest.

Rehearsals with the full line-up got underway in September 1972 at Richmond Athletic Ground clubhouse. Bruford and Wetton clicked immediately as a powerful rhythm section. The bassist recalled its potency: "What Bill and I provided was a kind of R&B rhythm section to what the 'aerial instruments' — Robert and David — would provide over the top, although it might have been in 13/8. We had a good grounding in Motown and jazz and blues. If you had a standard stodgy English rhythm section it wouldn't have worked, but we played around with the beat. It was very funky in a way."

Bruford agrees entirely. "I think John and I were very simpatico," he says. "We used to play Herbie Hancock records — *Crossings* had just been released that summer — and figure out how they worked, and built this powerful unit. Robert would sometimes refer to it as 'the flying brick wall' — you know, 'play with it or duck'. Highly unflattering! [Laughs]. But we definitely had some muscle. We weren't a wimpy group at all."

Muir told David Teledu from *Ptolemaic Terrascope* in 1991 that "Bill Bruford and I got on very well together musically, it seemed to me. He was a solid, tight, thinking studio type and I was very much into doing imaginative odd things."

But while rehearsing at Richmond, Muir gave his fellow drummer a public dressing down that practically reduced him to tears.

"Jamie was older than me and a powerful guy," Bruford recalls. "First of all, his instrumental arsenal was about five times the size of mine and occupied most of the rehearsal

Taking control at Command Studios in January 1973.

space. He gave me one of my first and best drum lessons. At one point he stopped the proceedings and said, 'What you're playing is crap.' And I thought what I was doing was quite good, because I had the fastest paradiddle in Sevenoaks, Kent, and being the young man that I was, I was determined to deploy it at every possible opportunity. And Muir quite quickly had seen right through that. He said, 'What you don't understand is that the music doesn't exist to serve you. You exist to serve the music.'

"It was all a bit fraught, to start with," Bruford continues. "I think part of [Robert] putting the band together was a bit like Miles Davis — you pick five interesting guys, lock them in a room together, and try to extract a collision of experiences from them. And if they make an album without actually killing each other first, it will at least be an interesting album."

Was there a rapport between the musicians? "I think there was, yes," says Cross." I don't remember there being any issues. John and Bill were both kind, generous people." He then describes how the material was worked up. "It was a democratic process: Robert had compositions, and he had fantastic ideas, and so did other people. We were lucky to get a long writing and rehearsal period — six weeks, I think. And the whole point was being yourself in that context. Sometimes we struggled with that, and sometimes it was easy, but that was what was on the table."

King Crimson had always sought a balance between finely crafted songs and hair-raising instrumentals, and lyrics were needed for the new material. Guitarist and songwriter Richard Palmer-James had known John Wetton from school in Bournemouth, where he had briefly met Fripp, and in the late 60s they had played in the bands Tetrad and Ginger Man. He had gone on to become a founder member of Supertramp, playing guitar and writing the lyrics for their self-titled 1970 debut album.

"What [*Larks' Tongues In Aspic*] means to me is something precious which is stuck, but visible. Something precious, which is encased in form."
Robert Fripp

DGM ARCHIVE/WILLIE CHRISTIE

"John played me hours of tapes from the rehearsal studio," Richard Palmer-James recalls. "We'd been listening to Frank Zappa's *Hot Rats* with 'Sugarcane' Harris, and John was so thrilled to be playing with a violinist who could improvise."

Wetton made a "vague postulation" that his friend might try to write some lyrics for King Crimson, and in the autumn of 1972, Palmer-James, who was then living in Germany, received a surprise package in the post. "It was a cassette with very rough demos of John on the piano," he recalls. "And these first two songs were *Easy Money* and *Book Of Saturday*.

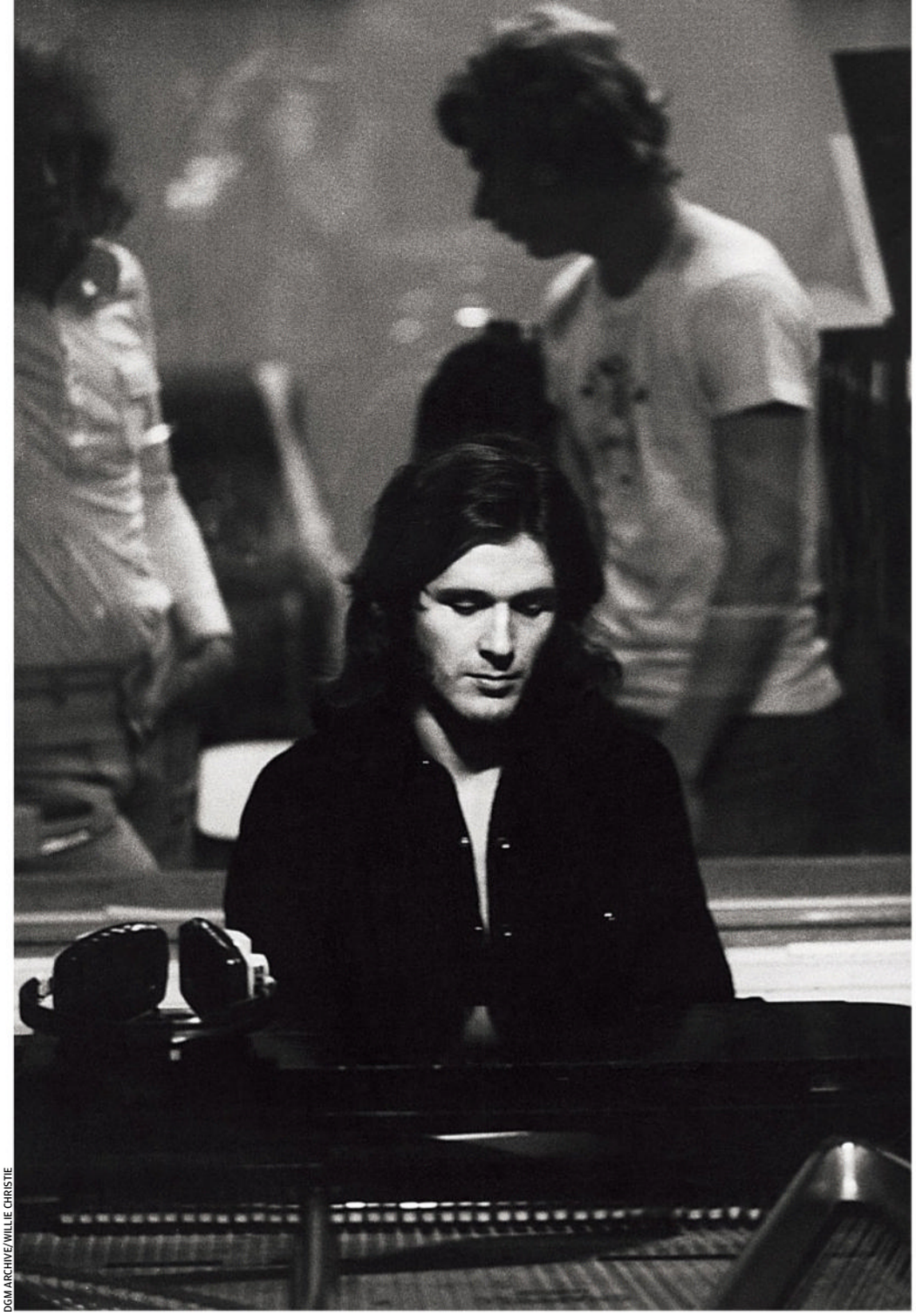
"The way I've always written lyrics is that I need to first have a melody line, practically for every syllable," says Palmer-James. He set to work, but given what had happened between Fripp and Sinfield, did he receive any guidance or stipulations? "I was expecting there to be a lot of fiddling around and head-scratching," he replies. "But they accepted what I'd written almost as if they were happy to have something they could use."

It's rarely mentioned that, with the inclusion of *Moonchild*, *In The Court Of The Crimson King* — progressive rock's first fully realised major statement — is actually 25 per cent free improvisation. It's an approach that's been rarely used in conjunction with rock music, where improvisation is usually jamming, soloing at length over a riff or chord sequence. "I wasn't much of a fan of that. Neither was Robert," says Bruford. "And nobody wanted to be in a second-rate kind of blues group. So blues pentatonic scales were avoided in favour of a more European voice."

When the new line-up began playing live in the autumn of 1972, their sets consisted of predominantly new material and improvisations that could last for up to half an hour. They would frequently encompass meditative, abstract passages and full-throttle groove excursions.

Violinists in rock were a rare breed at the time and Plymouth-born Cross was doubly unusual in that he was also adept at improvising. As a dance band pianist and a church organist, his father had been obliged to improvise. "He was a great improviser," he says. "It was clear to me from an early age that that was part of what you did in music."

"The reason why we were different was that we were prepared to jump off the cliff," Wetton recalled. "Half the set was improvised and we'd receive, minutes before going on, what the set would be. We had marker points where one person would start and the rest would follow, otherwise it's chaos. So if one person went out on a limb, the rest would support him. That was the only rule we had. Or I could start singing a song and we would go into a formal piece. Eight out of 10 times it worked great. We were telepathic, totally tuned in. It was an adventure every time and very exciting."



DGM ARCHIVE/WILLIE CHRISTIE

A pensive John Wetton during the recording of *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* at Command Studios.

On his first exposure to the new line-up, Ian MacDonald of *New Musical Express* was uncharacteristically gushing. He wrote: "Britain's most enigmatic combo... produced at least half an hour of the most miraculous rock I've ever heard." He also praised their collective dynamics: "Crimson aren't so much about sound and physical impact as about improvised form, simultaneity and ESP."

Melody Maker's Richard Williams was also impressed: "There is nothing more exciting than hearing a new band that single-handedly and out of the blue opens up completely new musical territory." In *Melody Maker* The Raver recommended readers to: "Look out for loony percussionist Jamie Muir and John Wetton's world-class bass."

If that sounded a tad disrespectful, Muir was clearly relishing his move from the serious world of free improv into the rock spotlight. He would prowl around his enormous percussion kit wearing a jacket that appeared to be made from animal pelts — which would have looked dapper in the Neolithic era — and when it all got too intense he might bite on a blood capsule.

The new album was to be called *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*, the title thought up by Muir when asked to describe the music.

"It may or may not be an actual dish available at your neighbourhood delicatessen," Fripp has stated. "But what it means to me is something precious which is stuck, but visible. Something precious, which is encased in form."

Most of the material had been played live but a lot more work had to be done in the recording sessions, which began at Command Studios, a suite of former BBC studios in Piccadilly, London in January 1973.

"It was in poor shape and things kept going wrong all the time, but we squeezed in," says Bruford. "Muir took 75 per cent of the space and everything of his was mic'd up; I was squished in a corner somewhere."

For Bruford it was a very different experience from his last stint in the studio, the lengthy process required to record *Close To The Edge* with Yes.

"*Close To The Edge* had more edits, more talk, more disagreement. On the whole *Larks' Tongues...* was a bit slicker, less talking, more agreement and quicker," he says.

Larks' Tongues In Aspic, Part One opens the album. Fripp had first presented it in part to the *Islands*

DGM ARCHIVE/WILLIE CHRISTIE

"Less talking, more agreement": taking a rare break at Command Studios in January 1973.

line-up in 1971, but claims it "wasn't recognised" by the musicians.

When taken to Command, the key structural elements of the piece were in place, but it was still a work-in-progress. In its 14-minute recorded form, it became a dazzling, episodic suite. The opening section was immediately disorienting. What *was* going on? It was the first and perhaps only appearance in progressive rock of the mbira, an African thumb piano, played by Muir, with a counterpoint glockenspiel line. This gives way to a shimmering curtain of metallic sounds and then, after three minutes, into an ominous staccato violin passage. This built up into an enormous drum roll that introduced a dramatic six-chord riff, an example of the "monstrous power" the percussionist had felt the band were capable of producing. The second time around this build-up includes what sound like two-note brass lines, which are actually Muir's car horns.

Then, in Bruford's words, there's "a fast-moving 7/8 passage", with himself and Muir striking sparks off each other against Fripp's angular and convoluted guitar-picking. After that came a new improvised section with Wetton on wah-wah bass, Fripp's frantic chord work, and Muir running across his percussion setup at breathtaking speed.

In the *Larks' Tongues In Aspic (The Complete Recordings)* 2012 box set,

"I was expecting there to be a lot of fiddling around and head-scratching. But they accepted what I'd written almost as if they were happy to have something they could use."
Richard Palmer-James

Why-eye Witness: Sid Smith Gets Crimsonmania

On December 8, 1972, King Crimson biographer Sid Smith's youthful love for the group was sealed by witnessing the *Larks' Tongues...* line-up live at Newcastle Odeon.

"It was obviously very exciting to see Bill Bruford and John Wetton in the line-up. I liked Yes but oddly I think it was John's arrival that prompted the most excitement as Family were also a big deal then, which tends to be forgotten today.

"The set didn't contain any recognisable numbers until the *Schizoid Man* encore. Given the amorphous nature of a piece like *Larks' Tongues In Aspic, Part One*, the open-ended section on *Easy Money* and the beginning of *Exiles*, it all sounded very weird and quite mysterious. What we now know were improvisations we honestly thought were composed as they all dovetailed into the composed material. Jamie Muir was dressed in bearskins and at one point was leaning over his kit hitting an object of some kind, looking like a wild animal straining at the bars of a cage. He thrashed chains over the cymbals and gongs like some demented bell-ringer. I'd not seen anything as theatrical as this.

"Afterwards, I went to the stage door to get my copy of *In The Court Of The Crimson King* autographed. Fripp said, 'Pax vobiscum' to the crowd of about 20 hairy hippies surrounding the car chanting, 'Fripp, Fripp, Fripp, Fripp,' to the tune of Monty Python's *Spam Song*. The night ended with a bunch of us chasing the Crimson car as it sped away, only to be immediately stopped by the traffic lights, enabling us to surround it, banging on the roof and windows screaming like the girls chasing The Beatles in *A Hard Day's Night*. The band inside were smirking and waving and John Wetton was creased with laughter as they pulled away." **MB**

DGM ARCHIVE/WILLIE CHRISTIE

there's a CD of studio run-throughs. At the start, Muir can be heard asking the engineer Nick Ryan, "Nick, is it possible to have the baking tin louder in my cans?" It's unlikely that Ryan would have ever received such a request before.

Muir's kit, Bruford notes, was "prepared" by chains being placed across the tom-toms and baking trays attached to the bass drum. "He instantly turned it into a metallic beast, clattery and indistinct," he says. "And it always sounded to me like traffic chaos. The section with Jamie going nuts was terrific. I remember it going down and I'm getting a little chill up my spine thinking of it now. It's exciting stuff."

What follows is the intermezzo or "water section", as Muir referred to it: a subdued duet between Cross' violin and his own zither played with hammered dulcimer mallets, delicately and at great speed, yielding harp-like glissandi. Bruford picks out a particular detail in this section: "David and Jamie play a small tune that they got together on the spot. And I've always seen that, in a way, as the lark's tongue in the aspic. A little jewel, a perfect moment of stillness right in the middle of all this mayhem."

"The album is absolutely precious in terms of the space between notes and the quiet passages, and I was very proud of what I managed to achieve within it," says Cross.

His violin solo reminds Bruford of the English pastoralia of Ralph Vaughan Williams — *The Lark's Tongue Ascending*, if you will — and there are also motifs reminiscent in mood of 20th-century Hungarian composer Béla Bartók's string quartets. Was he a direct influence?

"Yes, very much," Cross confirms, "particularly his string quartets. I listened to them as a teenager alongside *Rubber Soul*. I was fascinated by the scales that he used, and also the rhythms."

The ominous staccato theme from the start of the piece re-emerges, this time played by Fripp on guitar over which Cross plays a "running violin line". And there is a discernible vocal presence in the background. "It was a recording of a radio programme Jamie brought in, which featured a judge passing a death sentence," says Cross. "The words I remember are, 'You will be taken from this place and hanged by the neck until you are dead', and the word 'dead' coincided with the first note of the final section."

Another drum roll starts, but rather than ushering in more massive power chords, it turns into a melodic coda, with Wetton's bass to the fore, over a babel of barely intelligible voices. These are Bruford, Muir and Cross reading out passages from magazines.

There was nothing like *Larks' Tongues In Aspic, Part One* at the time and 50 years on it still sounds unique. After this mini epic comes three further songs. The concise, subdued *Book Of Saturday* offers light relief. It's played in trio format with Wetton's warm baritone backed by delicious interplay between Fripp and Cross, including an overdub of backwards guitar. Palmer-James' lyrics, which detail a relationship, include the striking lines: *'As the cavalry of despair/ Takes a stand in the lady's hair.'*

"I visited them in Command Studios when they were recording the album," says Palmer-James. "As a sort of conversational gambit I said I was worried that that line was over the top.

And Fripp said, 'No, it's one of my favourites, I love it.'

"All the lyrics I wrote for King Crimson were quite specific," he continues. "It's like a holographic picture of an affair or a sexual encounter, before, during, and afterwards. So they're the elements of hoping that it's going to work, enjoying it while it's working and regretting that it doesn't work, all wrapped up in this mêlée of words."

Exiles harks back to King Crimson's earliest days both style-wise and specifically, as it uses a theme from an unreleased composition, *Mantra*, which was played by the first line-up. But it's lighter, fresher and less grandiose than the Mellotron ballads of yore. Bruford concentrates on a crisp snare figure and Fripp plays acoustic and electric guitar. Cross came up with the main violin theme in an early rehearsal and plays uncredited flute and Wetton some uncredited piano.

"It has a wonderful melody," says Palmer-James. His poignant lyrics were written when he'd moved to Germany and was looking back nostalgically on the Bournemouth he'd left behind, with the lines, sung by Wetton, *'My home was a place by the sand/Cliffs, and a military band/Blew an air of normality.'*

During the introduction, Muir evokes currents of wind and water from, of all things, tape-manipulated recordings of glass rods rubbed with an oily cloth. There are also sounds like distant seagull cries, before the Mellotron looms up out of the sea mist. "I wish that I'd asked John, when I had the chance, about Jamie's scene-setting on *Exiles*. I think he must have told him that it's about Bournemouth," says Palmer-James.

Musically, *Easy Money* is a Fripp and Wetton composition and, according to Palmer-James, is, "A tale of a guy and his moll, as they used to say, and she has a talent for choosing winners at the races, which he makes shameless use of — he doesn't seem to mind getting ripped off by this character. It's sort of burlesque."

"I'll have you know that's the fastest paradiddle in Sevenoaks!" Bruford gets some lessons in technique from Muir.

It's also the album's rockiest track, a prime example of Bruford and Wetton's subtle funkiness, with Muir sloshing his hands in buckets of mud to accentuate the tolling rhythm of the introduction. He scrunches up paper and at one point dramatically unrolls a reel of tape. Fripp plays some corrosive guitar with a dry, buzzing tone. It ends with the sound of a Laughing Bag toy and then we are suddenly out into the windswept expanse of *The Talking Drum*, with

"It has secrets that can be revealed, depending on how you change as a human being."

Bill Bruford

Muir whirling a bullroarer, a sound akin to a giant mosquito. This begins a 14-plus-minute section of instrumental music that neatly balances the album's structure.

Muir plays a speedy free-form hand drum solo before settling on a rhythm, but is soon drowned out by Bruford and Wetton locking into a 4/4 rhythm with a bass line that see-saws around two chords with Cross extemporising and Fripp's guitar buzzing malevolently as it builds in intensity. Bruford has a confession to make. "*The Talking Drum* is terrific, very exciting, but unfortunately it slows up on the album — unforgivable [laughs]. That's quite a problem with young drummers. As they get louder they tend to get slower, which is my fault entirely. Sorry, guys. I didn't realise that at the time!"

Larks' Tongues In Aspic, Part Two is neither like *...Part One* nor like anything else in rock music at the time.

"I played *Larks' Two* for Bill and John right at the beginning and they didn't hear it," says Fripp told this writer in 2022, "and it wasn't until I re-presented it at rehearsals at Richmond in the Athletic Club, that they picked up on it and ran with it."

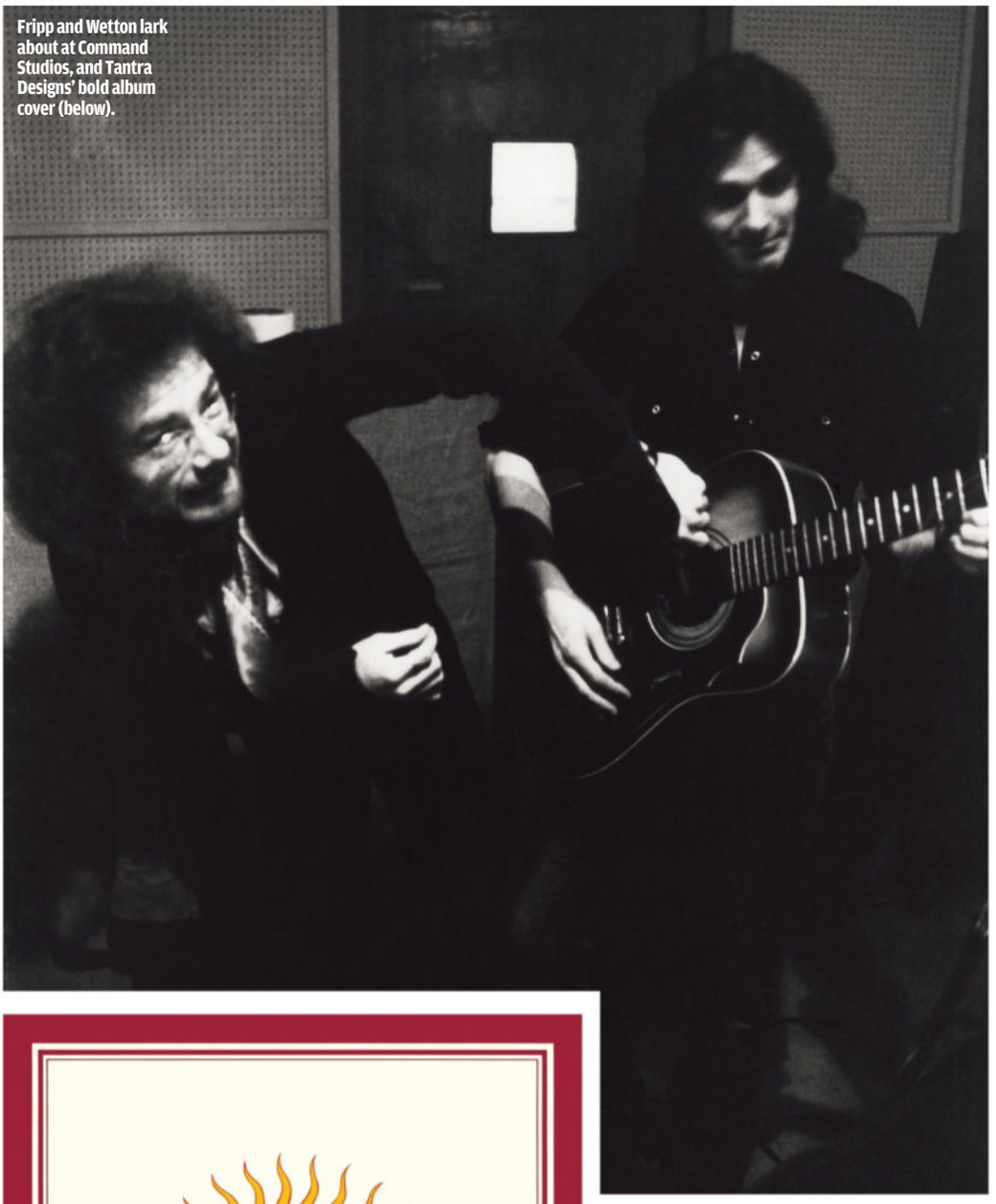
It was the first incarnation of Fripp's stark, riff-based compositions constructed from motifs that typically involve a small number of chords in insistent, rhythmically intricate combinations. Many progressive rock bands in the 70s were influenced by — or appropriated — romantic classical music, but the opening riff here sounds like the jagged cellos in *The Augurs Of Spring* section of Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring*.

"I always thought that Robert was more inclined to say that it was Bartók who inspired him," Cross recalls. "As a violin player, I play it much more like Stravinsky, so I tend to hear those accents as quite sharp, quite strong, with lots of attack. But listening to the record, they're not played like that by John and Robert. It's a bit smoother and more subtle than I used to hear it."

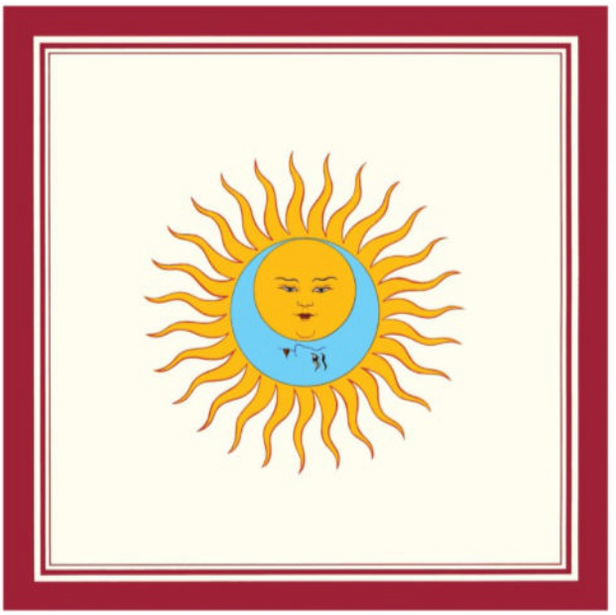
Towards the end of the composition, Cross' violin solo rears up spectacularly out of that formal grid pattern.

"What the 1973 David is saying to me is that's the only way I could get heard against the strength of that very powerful heavy riff," Cross says. "I was interested in using slides, so as the rest are playing very clear notes, you've got something where they'll hear what you're playing. Lots of slides and attack, and short notes."

And as the track and the album reaches its conclusion Muir signs off with a thrilling percussive onslaught as if he is trying to derail the piece's inexorable formal logic by sheer force. "That's exactly what's going on there," says Cross. "And that's the battle. Can we have complete freedom or do we have to follow the rules?"



Fripp and Wetton lark about at Command Studios, and Tantra Designs' bold album cover (below).



"*Larks' Tongues In Aspic* came close to being a defining album."

Robert Fripp

The striking cover image for *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* was chosen by Fripp: "The sun and moon cover is from a series of tantric symbols," he says. "I believe the artist was Peter Douglas of Tantra Designs. The symbol itself addresses the union of opposites."

It's also a visual key to something that Bruford hears in the music. "The King Crimson on this album could somehow straddle and counterbalance musical opposites," he says. "It could be one thing one moment, and another in another moment: a pastoral idyll over here and then traffic chaos over there.

"Myself and John, I think, were balanced by David and Robert," he muses. "On the whole, we were the muscular side of the group, and perhaps they were the more esoteric. And you had the juxtaposition of Muir's kind of folkloric instruments with the electric barbarity of the post-Stravinsky heavy riffage. Balancing

these things — the band seemed to be able to do that on a dime, which was really nice. And nobody constructed that; it was just something we were able to do, I think, really well."

Bruford also identifies both the album's "wide textural range" of instrumental combinations and its wide dynamic range. "The idea of getting from tiny, tiny 'ppp' to 'fff' in two or three minutes is very exciting and a lot of that went on, but it didn't help much with the record company."

He recalls being in Los Angeles in a limo with a senior vice president of Atlantic Records. The company was releasing the album in the States, but he knew little about the group. "The voice on the car radio announced, 'Here it is, the great new album from King Crimson.' They played *Larks' Tongues In Aspic, Part One* and the first three minutes were quieter than the road noise coming from the wheels of the car. He looked at me, thinking, 'Is this what Atlantic Records has just bought?' And I'm thinking, 'Oh, God, please come on to the riff, something that sounds like rock music.' Of course, if your version of rock music is sex, drugs and rock'n'roll, or three chords and the truth, there isn't an awful lot of that on *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*."

Even listening at home its dynamic range sounds exaggerated at times. Cross recalls that the whole band were involved in the production and mixing of the record.

"I think it was a very brave decision, but I think it was wrong — I've got to attribute this to Robert now, because there's something wrong with it," he jokes. "I certainly supported the decision at the time, but now I think the beginning [of *...Part One*] is too quiet; the violin solo, the intermezzo is too quiet; the vocal on *Easy Money* when it comes in is too quiet."

Fripp has his reservations about the album for different reasons: "*Larks' Tongues In Aspic* came close to being a defining album, but the sound wasn't good, because it was made at Command Studios and the band hadn't had enough experience playing it in," he says. "So it was a very strong beginning, but it didn't have the satisfaction for me of either *In The Court...* or *Red*, because it didn't sound as good. It wasn't as fully realised."

"I don't think they liked the sound of the finished product," says Palmer-James. "But I think it's got something special. It's rather dry, but that seems to fit the overall vibe."

Although the album remains a fan favourite, it received a mixed bag of reviews. Richard Williams of *Melody Maker* saw it ultimately as a failure and read its balancing of opposites within a wide stylistic remit as an "acceptance of compromise" and that while it had some "excellent moments", he felt that Fripp had chosen "to tread water and settle for the merely adequate". In *NME*, Ian MacDonald qualified his enthusiasm by wondering if the listener would, "See the album as the group do — a sequence of vivid contrasts of design and sound-quality — or, like me, hear a still slightly uneasy meeting of two extremes."

The album peaked at No.20 in the UK and at No.61 in the US. Tour dates had been booked but even before it was released the enigmatic Muir had left. Despite his crucial role in the group he was frustrated by the way his approach to improvisation came across with a rock band both live and in the studio. And even more importantly, he was following his Buddhist calling. "I went up to a Tibetan monastery in Scotland," he told *Ptolemaic Terrascope*. "I didn't feel too happy about letting people down, but this was something I had to do or else it would have been a source of deep regret for the rest of my life."

The four-piece line-up went on to make two more remarkable albums — the more astringent *Starless And Bible Black* and the carbon-dark near metal of *Red*, although Cross left before the latter was completed.

And, again, only the most gifted seer could have possibly predicted that Fripp would choose to disband this extraordinary group 18 months after *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* and just before *Red* was released. And also that King Crimson's story would pick up again many times and continue to the present day. As it stands the group have ceased live activities but have not officially broken up.

David Cross has played material from the album in both his own band and with Stick Men over the years, and The David Cross Band are due to play the album in its entirety for their Larks' Tongues At 50 shows in the UK and Germany. Listening back to the album recently he was struck by the sensitivity of the playing and "the taste and care over the phrasing". He also discerned "a rare kind of listening" in the musicians.

"When you're familiar with a style, you get to listen out for certain things, but with *Larks' Tongues...* the diversity of styles was such that you really had to pay attention all the time. We didn't know what we had to listen for so we had to listen to everything with really quite extraordinary results."

"What I really like about the album is you can approach it on all kinds of different levels," says Bruford. "I was looking at some reviews online and fell across this: 'One of the greatest prog albums ever. It sparks, then it's spooky, then it rocks hard, then it's mellow. Then it's funky, then it's epic and finally it crashes and blows up.' I think that's lovely and you could approach it in that way or go seriously deep if you want to, as with musicologist Andrew Keeling's book [*Musical Guide To Larks' Tongues In Aspic By King Crimson*].

"It has secrets that can be revealed, depending on how you change as a human being," he continues. "So how I hear it now is not at all how I heard it the day after we recorded it. Now I'm deeper into the album, and I hear, 'Ah, that's what he was talking about'; and 'That's why he played that'; and 'Oh, that's what we mean about opposites', and so on. Has it got plenty of meat to come back to in 50 years' time? I think that's the key to a good album."

The David Cross Band will play Larks' Tongues At 50 on April 28 at Trading Boundaries, East Sussex and on September 22 at Festsaal-Kreuzberg in Berlin. Support comes from Richard Palmer-James. See www.davidcrossband.com and www.dgmlive.com for more information.

Cross Purpose

Violinist David Cross explains how he's approached arranging *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* for The David Cross Band for his upcoming Larks' Tongues At 50 live shows.

PRESS/FOTORGRAF PK

Where do you start with a piece like this?
It's always important to me that the music represents the musicians. So it's listening to something, playing it, trying to go to the core of it, and then allowing it to grow. *Exiles* is a song that we've played for a long time and it's evolved. Our current version has a keyboard loop sound at the beginning and there's a violin over the top and a bass solo before it even goes into *Exiles* as we know it from the album, but that was the way that we felt we could get hold of the feeling of the original. And of course the audience is very important in this. So in order for it to be recognised as the same piece of music, you've got to work out what are the elements that have got to be there.

And presumably *Larks' Tongues In Aspic, Part One* requires a lot of individual input from the musicians?
It's almost a statement of those people. And don't think there's any rule about how to do that, I think it's just a question of: how much of this can I express as me? So each musician has to find their way into it, and then we have to find our collective way into it. So that is quite difficult to arrange. I'm still engaged in that. It's a work in progress but it's very exciting.

How do you feel about playing *Larks' Tongues...* after all this time?
I haven't played the album in its entirety before, but somehow it just seemed right. It's 50 years old and it deserves some of your attention – now, let's go back and see what was there and see what it means for you now. I do feel privileged to have a go at it and I'm sure we will produce something worth listening to. **MB**

Building The Ar

Emerging from the shadow of Sound Of Contact, Simon Collins and Kelly Nordstrom return as **eMolecule** with a sci-fi concept album about tyranny and redemption. The duo talk to *Prog* about being musical soulmates and the importance of always moving forwards and not looking back, with their lives, careers and music.

Words: David West **Images:** Nick Elliot

When Sound Of Contact released *Dimensionaut* in 2013, the band were tipped as the next big thing in progressive rock. The quartet — Simon Collins, Kelly Nordstrom, Dave Kerzner and Matt Dorsey — won the Limelight prize at the second Prog Awards and everyone waited with anticipation for their second album. But it never arrived.

In January 2018, Simon Collins and Kelly Nordstrom officially announced their departure from the band, yet the two musicians continued to collaborate, working together on Collins' 2020 solo album, *Becoming Human*. It was during the making of that record that guitarist Nordstrom planted the seed that grew into the duo's new band, eMolecule, and their debut album, *The Architect*.

It started innocuously enough, with Nordstrom coming up with a guitar lick that formed the basis for the track that gives the project its name, while Collins and producer Robbie Bronnimann were occupied on *Becoming Human*. "eMolecule came out of the ether," says Nordstrom. "The riff just fell out of my fingers. I recorded the demo in the room I was staying at, and it really had a positive impact with Simon."

To fan the creative flames lit from that spark, the pair started jamming and composing, and it became clear they were musically tuned into the same wavelength. "Through much deep discussion about where we are in our lives at the moment, in our careers, and what we want to achieve, what we don't want to do, we came to the realisation that we could do this together," says Collins. "Kelly and I started Sound Of Contact; it

"Kelly and I started Sound Of Contact, it was originally a duo, then we invited Dave Kerzner and Matt Dorsey in and things got sticky. So, we returned to what we did originally, but doing it right this time."

Simon Collins

eMolecule: building new ideas on *The Architect.*

chitect

was originally a duo, then we invited Dave Kerzner and Matt Dorsey in and things got sticky. So, we returned to what we did originally, but doing it right this time. We've worked together for a long time for a reason. I've always said this: Kelly is my musical soulmate, so that's where it all started."

With Nordstrom in Canada and Collins in Ireland, the foundations for *The Architect* were established when the two met for a month in September 2020.

"The first thing we did was start writing the concept," says Collins. "We definitely wanted to do a concept album, no question about it." The titular character is the protagonist in an epic sci-fi tale that begins with the tyrannous Architect's rise to power.

"*The Architect* became a vehicle for us finding a way to tell our story," says Nordstrom, "which we realised as we went along is the retelling of the one human story that we all tell and have told since the beginning of stories, of good and evil, of darkness and light, of transformation and spiritual enlightenment. The character of the Architect was our muse to describe this journey."

"He's basically an elite psychopath globalist eugenicist," says Collins. The first half of the album is the darkest, musically and lyrically, as the Architect reshapes the world to his whims. "We're talking about a very dark individual, which we express through my vocals but also Kelly does spoken word throughout the album," he continues. "That's supposed to be the character's inner dialogue and then I'm his outer dialogue. Halfway through the album, he discovers he's got two weeks left to live and so begins the transformation from dark to light. It's a redemption album and the second half is all about the last two weeks of his life and what he does with that time."

New album *The Architect* is out now.

One development from *Dimensionaut* is that where that record was a non-chronological experience, the story of *The Architect* unfolds in order from track to track.

"We were like, 'Well, he's a time traveller, it's going to be bouncing back and forth,' you could justify that," says Collins about *Dimensionaut*, "but at the end of the day, we took it to another level on this album concept-wise."

The pair enjoyed the process so much, they wrote enough songs for a double album, so they've held onto some for their next record.

The key to their productivity, according to Nordstrom, is their complementary skill sets. "He's got the drums, vocals, and everything in between, and I'm guitars," explains Nordstrom. "Guitar and drums, that combination has always been probably my favourite for writing. To team up with someone like Simon Collins is a dream come true. There's so much room for me to express myself uninhibited, unencumbered, so it allowed me to make a statement about who I've become as a guitarist and a musician. It allowed my riffs and my guitar ideas to really come through in a way that they hadn't been allowed to in my career thus far. It's been a cathartic and wonderful experience to be able to write this kind of music and then produce it so the guitars are right in your face when you want them. But there's also ambient things as well, so it's not just a wall of sound, riff factory. These are songs that explode when they've been designed to explode."

The Architect is heavier than *Dimensionaut* and was mixed by Daniel Bergstrand, who's worked with metal heavyweights In Flames, Behemoth and Meshuggah. When the guitars crunch, they bite down hard. However, while it can be intense, it's an album of different sounds, moods, and colours.

"We really didn't want to do a retro progressive rock-sounding album," says Collins. "I used to DJ psychedelic trance, some really gnarly, badass production, and I brought that to the table on this album. It's a great combination when you start mish-mashing industrial, electronica, psychedelic drum and bass stuff with heavy prog metal guitars. It's very modern and fits the mood of the album."

Collins used electronic V-Drums on *Becoming Human* and brought that approach to *The Architect* to broaden his own sonic palate. "Using the electronic kit, I have access to a massive library of drum sounds, so I was able to reach the drum sound that was needed for the specific song," he says. "Instead of the entire album having the same drum sound, I went for a different sound for every track, depending on what the track needed. I think that's something that Kelly and I always do when we're working on tracks; it's all about what the song needs. That's why you've got such a dynamic style on the album, from prog metal to electronica to industrial, even a bit of urban. We threw the formula book out. We're making it up on our own over here."

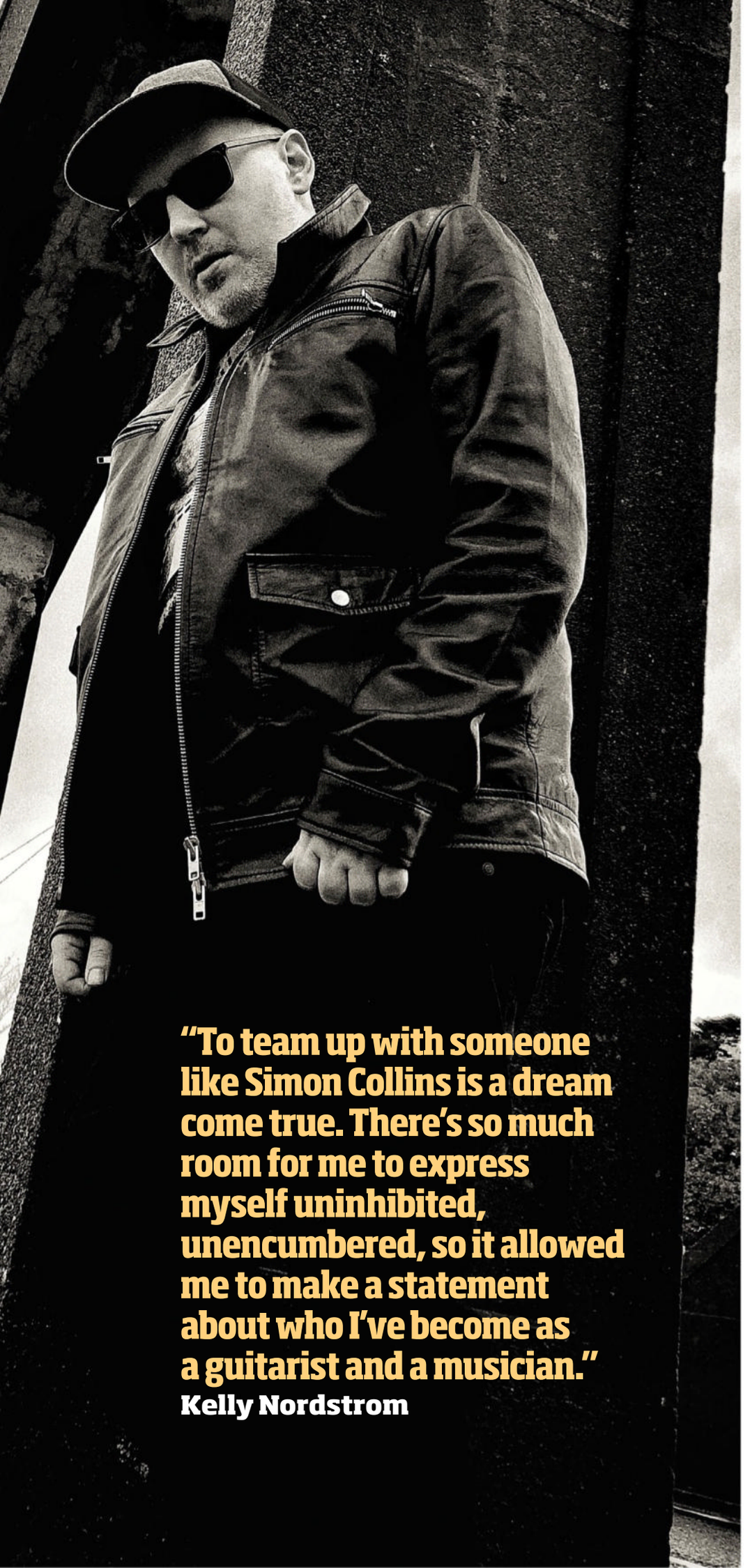
While *Becoming Human* was released on Frontiers, *The Architect* has brought Collins and Nordstrom to InsideOut, which Collins believes is the perfect fit for the eMolecule sound.

"Although *Becoming Human* had progressive moments and elements to it, it wasn't as much of a good fit as what we're doing now," he says. "I did play it for Thomas [Waber, head of InsideOut] and he said, 'This just isn't progressive enough.' That's fine, because that's not what I was doing on *Becoming Human*; it was much poppier, if you want to call it that."

However, back when Sound Of Contact came to a close in 2018, Waber told Collins to contact him the next time he had a prog project. "I hung onto those words," says Collins. "It's amazing working with Thomas, he's into longevity, so we just signed a three-album deal with them, and that's just the beginning. As long as we continue making music, I think Thomas is going to be right there beside us."

While Collins and Nordstrom's former Sound Of Contact bandmate Dave Kerzner has

Kelly Nordstrom and Simon Collins describe their latest project as "a cathartic and wonderful experience".



"To team up with someone like Simon Collins is a dream come true. There's so much room for me to express myself uninhibited, unencumbered, so it allowed me to make a statement about who I've become as a guitarist and a musician."
Kelly Nordstrom

suggested on social media that the door remains open for the band to reunite, it seems like that's not on the cards for the two halves of eMolecule. That's not to say there's any bad blood there.

"We're still on speaking terms, we support each other in what we're doing and that's cool," says Collins. "Every relationship has a shelf life; if you're in a relationship with someone, it doesn't mean you're going to spend the rest of your lives together, there's a time and place for everything and everyone. It became clear that everybody in Sound Of Contact wanted to have a career of their own. Dave's done fantastically well, he's such a talented artist."

Rather than dwell on the past, Collins has his gaze set squarely on the path forwards. Like the sound of *The Architect*, he's pushing into the future.

"I think the ultimate prize is happiness," he says about the demise of Sound Of Contact. "If you're in a situation that's successful but you're not happy, then you've got to take a look at that. You've got to be honest with yourself. Never lie to yourself is one thing I've learned."

"You never know," adds Nordstrom, before noting that in terms of his creativity, what he and Collins have with eMolecule is keeping him happily and fully occupied. "This is it," says the guitarist. "This is what I've been working toward my whole life. To be paired up with Simon, with such complementary abilities and with just the two of us, there's a combination of freedom and support that I wouldn't want to touch. I'm applying myself to it 100 per cent, so to find more room creatively in this particular arena, prog rock, I just see that eMolecule is going to be keeping us too busy." More than that, making *The Architect* has been an educational, affirming experience for Nordstrom on an artistic level. "If there was any doubt before, we've now proven to ourselves that we can do all that's necessary to make an album."

It's a musical relationship forged over 18 years and five albums together in different guises and capacities. "There's a psychic element between us," says Collins. "This isn't a bragging point, but we do find it quite pleasantly easy to work and write together and co-create without some of the issues that can come along in bands. We're very much intuitively connected as artists."

"We've been working together almost 20 years," says Nordstrom, "so what we've also been building for 20 years is trust and that's the foundation that we built this project on. The results are obvious. We're getting a genuine product, an authentic performance from each of us and we're drawing out our best material. This is the magic combination."

"Everything we've done in our careers has led us up to this point," confirms Collins. "I think me and Kelly truly feel ready for what we're doing now. It makes all the sense in the world and we're just so proud of what we've achieved so far and grateful for the support and excitement and enthusiasm that we've had so far. We're just buzzing with excitement."

The Architect is out now via InsideOut. See www.emoleculemusic.com for more information.

This Is Us. Have it!

Having been voted best unsigned band of 2022 in the *Prog* Readers' Poll, as well as performing at multiple festivals before they'd even released a full-length album, **Square Wild** aren't here to mess about. Except they are! Vocalist and guitarist Lucy Shevchuk explains how they're striving to make fun the centre of their world.

Words: Cheri Faulkner **Images:** Sophie Barrott

Square Wild aren't your usual prog band. In 2022, they were voted best unsigned band in this magazine's annual readers' poll, and frontwoman Lucy Shevchuk even made the top 10 female vocalists list.

"Jerry [Ewing, editor] messaged me himself with the news," Shevchuk remembers. "I paused for a second and then just burst into tears. I think that was the best moment I've had in the band so far."

Lucy Shevchuk: work hard, play harder!

These admirable accolades have been earned by Strange Wild's "huge mixing pot" of musical influences with a massive dose of fun. From jazz to punk, rock to reggae, Shevchuk explains that the band naturally write progressively due to their collective interests.

They met at Matt & Phred's, a jazz club in Manchester. Shevchuk laughs as she recalls that she and drummer Tomos Cooper were already a little familiar with one another.

"We'd been talking on [dating app] Tinder before we accidentally bumped into each other there," she says. "Clearly fate."

The formation of the band didn't come instantly though, and Shevchuk reveals that Cooper and guitarist Jack Vallance had some convincing to do.

"It took me a while to get the confidence to join. They kept bugging me after hearing me sing, and they were both studying music but I hadn't touched an instrument in about six years."

Luckily they eventually persuaded her, and six bassists later, Benedict Rhodes joined the fray permanently and Square Wild were officially born:

"When we found Benedict it was the first time we felt like a whole unit and since then we've made huge progress."

What's changed since then for the band?

"Our whole approach!" she replies. "Starting off, I was very serious. It can be great, but it can burn you out and remove the fun."

She explains Cooper changed her perspective on creating music, and thankfully so, as she claims she would be "a big mess" if not.

"Now, we treat the band, the writing process and the live show as pure fun with no goal and no expectation, and we're more authentically ourselves because of it. That's the best we can be."

Square Wild have certainly made an impact from that 'work hard, play hard' attitude across the UK's music scene, but ask Shevchuk why she thinks that might be and she initially seems a little stumped.

"There's definitely an air of, 'This is us, have it', and we do it for the pure fun of it," she says. "That seems to be coming across."

Alongside this playful demeanour it's evident that the band and the music itself is important to all of the members. It adds a certain element of professionalism that gives Square Wild a shine that demands listeners pay attention, whether that's on record or at one of their chaotically wonderful live shows.

"The prog community is an amazingly open-minded community... We don't need to try hard for people to give us a go."

As a result of such a muddle of genres working synonymously, Shevchuk explains that not everyone's a fan of the band, but that's okay, and that the very fluid style of music they write is "a blessing and a curse".

"We're of the attitude that if you don't like us, cool. We're not aiming for stardom or mass appeal; we're aiming to express ourselves and enjoy ourselves as authentically as we can and hope that people share in that joy," she

explains. “That’s just what Square Wild is: four weirdos mixing their influences and creating something together.”

This mixed style comes naturally to Square Wild, but Shevchuk adds that the group never wanted to shoehorn themselves into one genre.

“We feel there’s too many bands that aim directly for one area and end up a cookie cutter band that lacks exploration.”

And a cookie cutter band they are certainly not. For their debut EP gig they put on the Square Wild Mega Fest, which was never intended to be a standard show.

“There was no way we were going to do a normal release, book a venue, put three bands on and be done with it,” Shevchuk explains. Instead, they put on a whole day festival that spanned multiple genres and it sold out.

“A lot of gigs lack representation of multi-genre bands and we got so bored of the same rock, the same metal, the same styles,” she continues. “This was our opportunity to expose people to music that doesn’t stick within genre boundaries, and they loved it.”

Shevchuk explains that they’re trying to establish the Square Wild Mega Fest as an annual festival – it’ll run again this year in Manchester on June 3.

“It’s proven to people that we are willing to take risks and do things the way we want them. I think we’ve gained a lot of respect for it,” she says with a smile.

This creativity and huge dose of entertainment that Square Wild naturally produce spreads back as far as the writing process. In fact, Shevchuk explains that their song *Fishman* was actually about Cooper taking an eternity to clean a fish tank.

“I said while he was cleaning, ‘I’m sick of waiting for the fish man.’ We looked at each other and knew there was something there, so we morphed it into this whole story that had nothing to do with the original meaning.”

And that writing process continues. Square Wild are currently recording their debut album in-house.

“It’ll take a while but it’ll be worth it,” smiles Shevchuk, before adding, “Oh, and we also have Mike Grubert [of Love Letters From Space] joining us, who’s an awesome guitarist.” She clarifies that Grubert will be replacing Vallance on guitar for live shows while Vallance prioritises some “real-life things”.

Shevchuk agrees that anyone with an ear for new music should give Square Wild a spin: “The prog community is an amazingly open-minded community. It feels like we don’t need to try hard for people to give us a go. All I’ll say is the album is going to be insane. We’ve been told multiple times that there’s no one like us around right now, so give us a go!”

The Tree.P EP is out now via all major digital platforms. See www.squarewildband.com for more.

L-R: Mike Grubert, Benedict Rhodes, Lucy Shevchuk, Tomos Cooper, Jack Vallance.

“Our music is pretty intense at times, and you need to have that kind of balance - if you bombard the listener with too much of the same mood or colour, they’re going to turn it off, and not come back.”

Richard Henshall

Animal Magic

On their seventh studio album, **Haken** are ready to bust any pre-conceptions about where they might or might not fit musically. *Fauna* is inspired by the natural world and finds the progressive metal six-piece entering new musical territory. Multi-instrumentalist Richard Henshall and returning keyboard player Pete Jones reveal the story behind its creation and the "anything goes" attitude that helped to shape it.

Words: Grant Moon **Images:** Max Taylor-Grant

Haken are back in business!

Richard Henshall's been in his home studio, trying to get his impressive hands around the guitar parts for *Messiah Complex* so it's gig-ready.

That five-part, 17-minute suite from Haken's presciently titled 2020 release *Virus* was the brainchild of their drummer, Ray Hearne, and, says Henshall, "It's easily our hardest song to play. Each of us has probably spent about a year trying to get it up to scratch. When he wrote it Ray just programmed the riffs with his fingers on a keyboard, but it's almost impossible to actually *play*. But we'll try it, and we'll see."

By now, they will have. When this issue of *Prog* lands, the London prog metal sextet will be deep into their 37-date Island In Limbo tour, a co-headline jaunt across Europe

with North Carolina's finest, Between The Buried And Me. It's Haken's longest continuous run of shows, during which they'll play some of their biggest venues. While the tour serves in part as a soft relaunch for *Virus* (which never got its proper shake because of, well, The Virus), it also marks the start of a big, year-long push for their new, seventh album.

What a many-headed beast *Fauna* is. Magnificently mixed and mastered by Jens Bogren (who did the same for their 2013 breakthrough album, *The Mountain*), it's colossal, detailed and dizzyingly diverse. Just contrast the epic first single, *Nightingale*, and the current heavy-hooky one, *Lovebite*, the latter with lyrics inspired by the mating ritual of the black widow spider. There's a lot to unpack here.

They'll take the record to North America in May with The Fauna Expedition Tour, starting in Nashville on May 3 and closing in Chicago on June 3. A few weeks later, they'll be at Midsummer Prog in the Netherlands and the following month there's their high-bill slot at Manchester's Radar Festival, which will be a 10th anniversary set for *The Mountain*. And more shows are in the works after that.

"It's crazy," Henshall tells *Prog*, when we speak to him a fortnight before jetting off to Hamburg for the opening show. "It's gonna be the busiest year in our career, and I'm very excited. We've been at home for the last two and a half years, practically stuck in the house, changing nappies and watching Netflix. So it's gonna be a real contrast to be back on the road."

Henshall's partner had their second child over lockdown, during which time singer Ross Jennings also became a father of two. The Haken boys are all grown up, with parental concerns. "Leaving your family behind is 100 per cent the trickiest part of being a musician," Henshall says. "It's amazing to go out and meet the fans and play the music that you've written, but the flip side is that you're away from your family. On this tour I'm going to miss both of my children's birthdays, and I feel really bad about that."

Jennings' first taste of touring as a dad came last May, when Haken joined prog metal titans Symphony X in the US. As well as being the first time they'd played since the lockdowns, the shows also marked the return of an old friend into Haken's ranks.

Pete Jones was the band's first keyboard player. He joined in 2007, and played at their first gig at Leonard's, a small, now-closed venue in north-east London. He can also be heard on their early demos, including their 2008 calling card, *Enter The 5th Dimension*.

Jones has been playing piano since the age of six, and gravitated towards jazz and prog in his early teens. He was just 15 when he replied to Haken's 'keyboardist wanted' ad, on a Dream Theater-related web forum. It's actually through Jones that drummer Hearne joined — the pair have been best friends since primary school.

"I met Ray when we were four," Jones tells *Prog*. "We were always doing music together one way or another. As kids we got into power metal — Angra, Stratovarius — then death metal, and when we were about 12 I discovered Dream Theater through my brother, and showed them to Ray."

He left the band after just a year to pursue his studies in theoretical physics to PhD level. In conversation, Jones is friendly, and he radiates intelligence. These days he's high up in the field of data science.

"It's using mathematical models and computer algorithms to learn from data," he explains, patiently. "It's the thing everyone's been talking about the last 10 years."

Mexican keyboardist Diego Tejeida replaced him in the group, but Jones remained within Haken's inner orbit. During his PhD he joined Henshall and BTBAM bassist Dan Briggs in prog/fusion trio Nova Collective, playing on their 2017 one-off LP, *The Further Side*. He began his own, rather excellent solo project, Nested Shapes, making "glitchy, ambient electronic stuff", and for Haken contributed drum programming to *Virus* and previous album, *Vector*. By November 2021,

when Tejeida departed the band citing "different musical visions", Jones was firmly back in the fold.

"I couldn't ask for better luck or timing," says Jones. "I always knew what was happening in the Haken world, so I knew that they were likely to separate with Diego quite ahead of time. Ray spoke to me informally about joining at first, and it became a formal thing late in 2021. But the band were a bit stagnant, as many were during lockdown, and I hoped things would start happening at some point."

In May last year, Jones found himself doing his comeback Haken show. In the Caribbean. On the Cruise To The Edge tour. They did two sets — one comprising covers (Yes, Gentle Giant, Queen et al) and the other using material from their own catalogue.

"I'd never played a professional gig really, ever," Jones says with a bemused laugh, "and to suddenly be playing prog classics aboard a cruise ship surrounded by some real prog legends was just surreal. Then we got back to land and toured with Symphony X, which was my first tour, and it went

New album *Fauna* is out now.

"There's this raw feeling of experimentation – the restraints are off, let's just see what we can create."

Pete Jones

These lads reckon their latest sounds like Toto meets Devin Townsend and who are we to disagree with them!

really well. There was great energy in the band. We were having fun and making the most of it."

"It's been so much fun having Pete back on board," says Richard Henshall. "He's injected so much energy and new life into the whole process."

By the time of the Cruise and Symphony X shows *Fauna* was already cooking, with Jones pitching in wholeheartedly. That February the band – Henshall, Jones, Hearne, Jennings, guitarist Charlie Griffiths and bassist Conner Green – had rented a house near Brighton, and lived together for a week. They turned the living area into a makeshift studio, and thrashed out the details for *Fauna* – mapping the arrangements, vocal lines and melodies, discussing the lyrical themes. They had imagined some band bonding – watching movies, yomps across the South Downs. Instead, they worked 15-hour days on the album.

That week was important to give cohesion to the material, because Haken write in an unusual way these days. For 2010 debut *Aquarius* and the next few albums that followed, Henshall penned the lion's share, with the band then fleshing the tunes out in the rehearsal room. But around the time of 2016's *Affinity*, the whole group began to pitch in. Members would team up in different combinations to write, then bring their songs to the table for the others to add their own parts. It's this method that's perhaps responsible for *Fauna*'s broad palette. One of the early tunes was *Nightingale*, the first single, released last April. The lyrics came from Jennings and Griffiths. It draws on Hans Christian Andersen's tale of an emperor who tires of his pet nightingale and gets a mechanical replacement. When he falls ill the real bird returns, and its song helps bring him back to health. The music was written by Jones and Hearne. The song comes in on Jones' mellifluous, complex, Radiohead electric piano part, and the band then push it firmly into their own terrain.

"Pete's got these very strong jazz influences," says Henshall, "and he came in with this cool jazz progression, and the song stemmed from there.

We took it and made it Haken — we made it dense, heavy and dark, and added polyrhythms to it.

"That was almost Pete's introduction to the fans: 'This is Pete, our 'new' keyboard player. What do you think?' That was almost a year before the album came out, a lot of fans assumed it was the start of the process and we'd have an album out three months later, but there was a big gap until the next release."

The next was *The Alphabet Of Me*, emerging nearly eight months later in December 2022. With an 80s Yes chorus, syncopated beat and synthy, poppy moments, the song draws on Henshall's affection for eclectic UK indie/electro rap-rockers Everything Everything. Jennings' abstract lyrics channelled Philip K Dick's *Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?*, and its classic film adaptation *Blade Runner* ('*There's a tear in the rain, momentary pain*'). Vocally, Jennings' flow is soulful, on the cusp of R&B here.

"We all love pop, jazz, electronic, metal," says Henshall, "and that song really embodies the spirit of the album. There's a lot going on: the Sting/Police 'whoas' at the end, the trumpet solo. A lot of music just washes over you and you forget it after you've heard it, but we want our stuff to be memorable and catchy — we want people to sing along. We spend a lot of time getting that hook in the chorus. Our music is pretty intense at times, and you need to have that kind of balance — if you bombard the listener with too much of the same mood or colour, they're going to turn it off, and not come back."

Fauna bristles with such hooks, memorable moments and ideas from the clanging harmonics, dizzying grooves and soaring chorus of opener *Taurus*. There are so many riffs and details in Charlie Griffiths' relentless, Gentle Giant-y magnum opus, *Elephants Never Forget*, it's hard to pinpoint the central motif, in a good way. With its sub-bass and fast-tremoloing guitar textures evoking Tool and Porcupine Tree, *Island In The Clouds* also features an extraordinary one-take instrumental from Henshall, retained from his original demo.

Jones' low, jazzy piano cascades on the cinematic *Beneath The White Rainbow* hint at the influence of another band favourite, Armenian jazz piano virtuoso Tigran Hamasyan. Jennings channels Mike Patton's Mr Bungle in his entertainingly manic vocal excesses mid-song — apparently when he first did them, at the Brighton house, it put his bandmates on the floor with hysterics.

By turns soulful and metallic, that black widow tune *Lovebite* has some beautiful melodies delivering brutal lines: '*We consummate, decapitate, I will leave your rotting corpse here to decompose.*' Henshall loves that juxtaposition: "The whole idea was basing the lyrics on a Cannibal Corpse/Corpsegrinder approach, but mixed with this very happy music. It's almost like Toto meets Devin Townsend — it has that Toto-like syncopation, then that Devin heaviness in the chorus. That's what we were going for!"

L-R: Richard Henshall, Conner Green, Ross Jennings, Charlie Griffiths, Ray Hearne, Pete Jones.

Hearne's dry, jazzy drums introduce *Sempiternal Beings* with its plaintive 7/8 verse giving way to a head-nodding chorus (in 15/16, apparently) and a raw, emotive guitar solo from Charlie Griffiths that really suits the song; Henshall reckons he was channelling Pain Of Salvation here. All this and striking lyrics too. The animal in question here is Turritopsis dohrnii, or the immortal jellyfish ('*Medusa, a haunting allure/Elusive ectoplasmic residue/Spineless stinger servant healer*'). The words and the very sounds Jennings makes work so well for his voice as an instrument, while delivering on the lyrical concept that weaves the record together.

The album's animal theme stemmed from lyrics Henshall wrote for what became the record's moving closer. *Eyes Of Ebony* is ostensibly about the fate of the endangered white rhinoceros, but it's actually about the guitarist's father.

A big influence on his son, Peter Henshall was a serious prog fan. He loved Yes, King Crimson and Pink Floyd. In the family home years ago, Richard recalls that the wall above the stairs was dominated by a poster of Floyd's striking artwork for *The Division Bell*. As he developed into a musician and Haken began to play shows, his dad was there: "He wouldn't even tell me he was coming sometimes. We'd seen him in the queue — he'd never want to be on the guest list, always wanted to buy a ticket. He was all about supporting the band, he wanted us to be successful."

He was a passionate gig-goer. Father and son would go together to see David Gilmour, the Australian Pink Floyd, Zappa Plays Zappa, and the heavier stuff too — Meshuggah, Periphery,

Leprous. But over the lockdown Peter Henshall was diagnosed with an auto-immune disease. It wasn't immediately life-threatening, but with his system compromised he absolutely needed to shield, and did so, in his flat where he lived alone. Even when normality returned to the world, the illness meant his life would be very different.

There's a striking line in the song: *'Freed from limbo you were fighting for your life/In the heat of the flames of dying embers, burnt to ash.'*

"My dad was in this limbo period," Richard explains. "The disease didn't cripple him, but it happened in lockdown, so he couldn't leave the house because he was suddenly vulnerable. I could sense in him that he felt, 'I won't be able to go to gigs after the pandemic – I'm just kind of waiting now, waiting for the end.'"

In March 2021, Richard and his brother became extremely concerned when their father was not answering his phone. They found him in his flat, where he had suffered a fatal heart attack. He was 75.

"It's been so much fun having Pete back on board. He's injected so much energy and new life into the whole process."

Richard Henshall

"There's a reference to the moment of finding my dad," Richard says, "which was horrific, but if I'm honest writing the lyrics was therapeutic, it was a good way for me to get it out there. I don't know how I'll feel if we play it live, but it'll definitely be a special song for me."

The song alludes to he who *'sang his last lullaby at the great gig in the sky'*, and to the man who *'gave me the power to believe as we climbed to the mountaintop'*. It's a moving tribute indeed. As with the rest of the album, musically *Eyes Of Ebony* was a joint effort. Pete Jones added some sound design touches. He's into "binaural processing", or, he explains (sounding like the cool physics teacher), "the sounds that pop out at you from strange bits of the stereo field, rather than just being in front of you." He's also done a remix of the song, and this Nested Shapes-style reimagining is earmarked as a bonus track for the Japanese edition of *Fauna*.

Jones and Diego Tejeida are both sophisticated, yet disparate soundsmiths. "Diego writes parts differently to me," Jones says. "On the last run we did some pretty keyboard-heavy things like *1985* and *Nil By Mouth* – there's a lot to learn, and lots of sounds to program. But on this album, my role is less about what I'm playing, and more about what the overall band's sounding like, and how can I enhance that ambience, that feeling. More often that's a production or sound design thing rather than a line I could write out on a stave. Haken's music is a very rich tapestry – it can bear these more glitchy things. There's no synth leads on the album at all."

He's learned *Virus* in its entirety, including *Messiah Complex* which, when we speak, is in his RAM and good to go for the European tour. Having been involved at both ends of the band's career, he's in a unique position to comment on how things have changed: "It's actually come full circle. When I joined Rich was the predominant writer; he was prolific and fast, and had six years on me and Ray – but we were writing together in a jam room, as a group. After I left, on those first few albums, Rich would write everything, basically, and the band would help build the arrangements. But right now feels like those early days. There's this raw feeling of experimentation – the restraints are off, let's just see what we can create. It's a similar mindset to what we had in 2007, and I know Ray, Ross and Rich have felt that too."

Henshall agrees. "We had a 'no filter' rule on this album: make it as crazy as you want. A reggae riff, a bassoon solo – anything goes! Everyone brought in their own influences and it's resulted in our most exhilarating album, and definitely our most diverse. We've fully realised that spirit of collaboration. We're starting a new chapter with Pete, with Covid behind us. We can move upwards again."

And with *Fauna*, Haken have the right animal for the job.

Fauna is out now via InsideOut. See www.hakenmusic.com for more information and tour dates.

Attack Of The Klones

Klone's new album, *Meanwhile*, is an exciting slice of concise yet progressive rock. Guitarist and co-founder Guillaume Bernard tells *Prog* about the hankering for gigs that inspired it – as well as their career-long journey from metal to art-rock.

Words: Matt Mills **Images:** Leo Margarit

Guillaume Bernard isn't feeling very well. "My girlfriend is ill, and so am I," the guitarist of atmospheric art-rockers Klone tells *Prog* when he joins our telephone call from his home in Poitiers. "I have Covid."

Mercifully though, Bernard sounds okay, speaking in his thick French accent and answering every question that we throw his way at length. It's a testament to his belief in the band he co-founded in 1995 — as well as their new release, *Meanwhile* — that he's still so eager to talk while under the weather.

The band's seventh album was forged through the fires of the pandemic. *Meanwhile* is the svelte and energetic sibling to 2019's critically acclaimed *Le Grand Voyage*. On one level, the relation between the two is obvious. Both are hypnotic delves into the bliss of post-rock. The songs witness gorgeous guitars and frontman Yann Ligner's voice — so powerful yet controlled that it'd make Maynard James Keenan sweat — gradually crescendo into dramatic finales. Yet there's still space for earworm choruses amid those progressions.

On *Meanwhile*, though, Klone trim the fat and haul the hooks to the forefront. Opener *Within Reach* is a masterful display of pop-prog rock, Ligner crooning a majestic chorus as the track's avant-garde chords grow louder and louder. *Scarcity* fits the post-rock model into a brisk four and a half minutes, as percussion clamours underneath shimmering guitars, while *Elusive* contrasts some ethereal vocal production with marching drum beats.

According to Bernard, the tightening of Klone's songwriting was done with the live show in mind — and during an era where gigs were sorely missed.

"The last album was very atmospheric," he explains, "and, for this one, we had time to compose a lot of songs, thanks to Covid. We did a European tour with Leprous [in February 2020] then Covid hit, and we wrote about 20 compositions after that. When you play a lot of atmospheric songs together live, sometimes you need to have a heavy song in there. Playing live, it's like a sport: when you're onstage, it's really cool to feel something stronger."

The live environment wasn't just the focus during the songwriting phase, either. When Klone entered the studio to record *Meanwhile* in February 2022, they did so with the sound technicians from their live shows producing and mixing, including Chris Edrich. The fellow Frenchman has long been part of the band's tour crew and boasts a CV that lists a host of modern prog titans. If you've ever seen Leprous, The Ocean, Caligula's Horse or Uneven Structure in the flesh and been bowled over by how pristine they sound, you owe Edrich a drink.

"Chris, today, lives in Dublin," Bernard says, "so he's a bit far from our houses. It was complicated to work with him during the

Klone's latest album is a step up from their previous work...

"When we were young, we didn't think about, in the future, playing progressive music."

L-R: Enzo Alfano, Yann Ligner, Guillaume Bernard, Morgan Berthet, Aldrick Guadagnino.

mixing session, because we were supporting Pain Of Salvation on a big US tour for the first time. We needed to send files through WeTransfer and it was hard to say to him what he had to do. There's a lot of detail in this music: you'll hear saxophones and small details on keyboards or guitar. Chris sometimes prefers to put in this big wall of guitar, with the rest sometimes being unimportant, so we took a lot of time. But, today, we are really happy with his work. You can hear all of the things we wanted you to hear on this album."

Creating a tight and melodic prog rock album brings Bernard full circle. The guitarist was born to an electrician father and a homemaker mother in Châtellerault, a town 40 minutes north-east of Poitiers. Although he admits, "When we were young, we didn't think about, in the future, playing progressive music", melodic yet experimental bands like Pink Floyd and The Beatles were among his mum and dad's favourites.

> "There's a lot of detail in this music: you'll hear saxophones and small details on keyboards or guitar."

However, before Bernard could fully appreciate the nuances of those classic artists, he grew up as an angsty metalhead. "The first big show I saw was in Nantes: it was [Californian metal band] Machine Head," he remembers. "It was amazing!"

He continues, "At school, I was a little bit shy and not sure of what I would do with my life. I had two hobbies. I played rugby, because we were in the countryside without internet and needed something to do, and played music with my friends. We covered bands like Megadeth together."

It was in the mould of brutes like Machine Head and Meshuggah that Klone formed. Bernard started the band, initially named Sowat, with original drummer Laurent Thomas. The pair's fathers were best friends, so, Bernard says, "It was really easy [starting a band together] because I'd seen him since my first day in this world." Vocalist Ligner joined later, after Klone's debut album *Duplicate* came out in 2003.

"He was playing in another band called Scarr," recalls Bernard. "For me, it was instantly clear that I needed to work with this singer. I remember driving back from his show with our other guitarist [Michael Moreau] and telling him that he was a singer we needed to have in our own band."

As Klone continued, album after album, their soundscape calmed, integrating the influences Bernard was surrounded by while growing up. What were once roaring vocals became gentler melodies, while angular riffs mellowed into out-there chord progressions. The band's 2015 album, *Here Comes The Sun,* was their most accessible yet proggy release when it came out, and validated their approach by becoming their breakthrough. Today, the single *Nebulous* has more than a million Spotify streams, and is their second most listened-to song, behind *Yonder* from *Le Grand Voyage*.

"When you're younger, you need to hear something 'stronger'," Bernard rationalises. "[Growing up] it was not cool to hear pop music. Maybe, at one moment in my life, I just started to feel more calm and quiet. I always had in my mind bands like The Beatles. To me, they were a really important band: I know all the songs and albums perfectly because my father had them on vinyl."

Now that they've released a concise, classically inclined prog album tailor made for the live environment, the next entry on the Klone to-do list is to actually take these songs out onto the road. In March and April, the band will play on British shores for the first time in a decade, supporting Devin Townsend. The last time they were here, they were playing under prog metal force Orphaned Land in November 2013. What the hell's taken them so long?!

"I don't know exactly," Bernard answers. "We've played in Turkey, Israel, Greece… Even the last time we toured with Leprous, it was a pity because there was no show in England. I know that, because of Brexit, it's more complicated to go to England; if you only have an ID, you can't go. I really need to get a new passport, and quickly!"

Beyond touring in 2023, the future of Klone – logistically and musically – is a mystery to Bernard. "I don't know what I will have on my mind in the future," he shrugs. "But I'm the principal composer of the music and I always have loads of ideas that I end up recording on my phone. When you have a singer like Yann, you have all kinds of possibilities of music you can play with him. You can write progressive things, or big metal riffs."

More of the former, please!

Meanwhile is out now via Kscope and Klone tour the UK with Devin Townsend in March and April. See www.facebook.com/kloneband for more.

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“I feel strongly about quite a lot of things, that’s why people say I’m a bit preachy.”

No plain sailing: Guy Manning and [inset] the stormy artwork for *Making Shore*.

Land Ahoy!

After a five-year wait, **Damanek** are back with their third album, *Making Shore*. Founding member Guy Manning talks to *Prog* about the obstacles they overcame to get the record finished, writing a 30-minute epic and the drawbacks of being a multinational band.

Words: Chris Cope
Portrait: David Albone

"It's been a labour of love, and I think the front cover sums it up neatly," Damanek leader Guy Manning says, referring to the stormy seas that adorn the artwork for *Making Shore*. "We're the lifeboat and we're trying to get this damn thing to shore."

Thankfully the band did make it to land, but it wasn't without plenty of pushback. There's a sense of relief that the group, whose members are spread across the globe, even managed to get their third album finished: Covid, illness, logistics and schedules all created roadblocks.

"It was over two years ago when I had all the songs pretty much in place," multi-instrumentalist and vocalist Manning says. "We had a whole raft of problems from one thing after another. Just getting it finished has been stop-start, stop-start all the way along. It's been quite painful on that side of it."

But no pain no gain, as the saying goes, and the end result finds the prog rockers accruing significant acclaim. It marks the follow-up to the spirited two-album spurt Damanek enjoyed in 2017 and 2018 with debut *On Track* and the subsequent *In Flight*. The group, whose core membership is completed by Sean Timms of Unitopia and Southern Empire (on keys, backing vocals and programming) and saxophonist Marek Arnold, have gently honed their expressive, adventurous melodic prog rock aura since their debut.

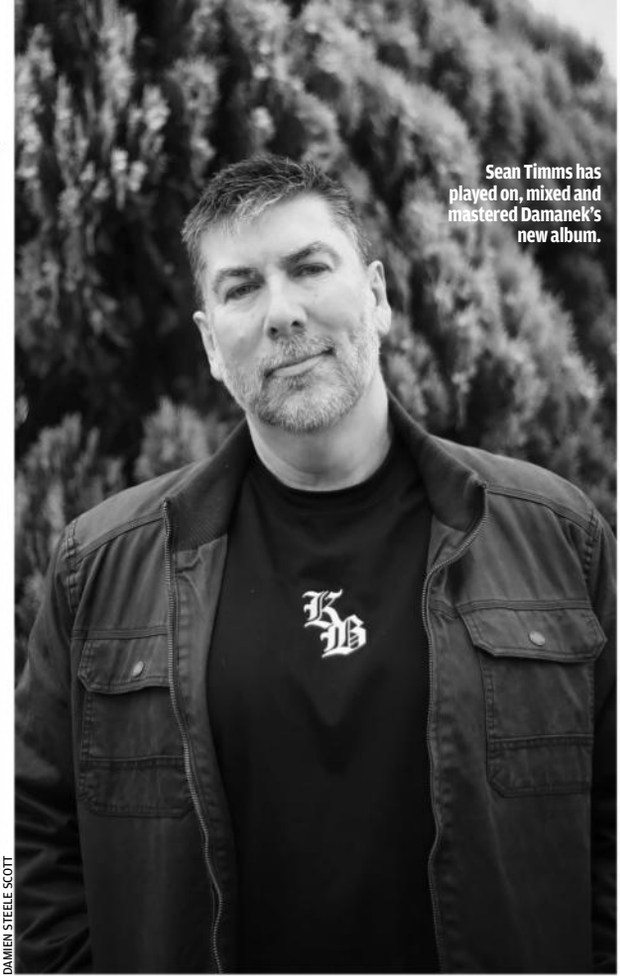
"I think we've got more confident in what we can do," Manning, also a founder member of The Tangent, reflects. "So the albums have been an evolution. I wouldn't say there are better songs on here than there were on *In Flight* or *On Track*, it's just that we're getting more confidence in our abilities to be able to sift, arrange and present material in a better way. The next album — if there is one — will be even better, I'm hoping."

Speaking on Zoom from his home in Leeds shortly after their album release, Manning is a bit wary of the prog tag — "I think I've probably got more in common with Thomas Dolby than I have with Genesis" — but the 30-minute *Oculus* suite, which closes the new album, aren't fooling anyone. Divided into a nine-minute overture and four acts, it's set around a story inspired by the works of Lewis Carroll and HG Wells, as well as *The Portrait Of Dorian Gray*. Prog fans should certainly get their fill — and then some.

"It's a mash-up of all sorts of literary ideas and things," Manning explains. "The story of Oculus started with an idea of him noticing in a mirror things weren't quite right. And then it all came from there, that he stepped in the mirror and went to different places. I wrote this thing, and thought, 'I can't get that into a four-minute pop song.'"

The rest of the album sees Manning cover the gamut of songwriting topics: there are warnings about climate change and overpopulation, ruminations about dementia, Mount Everest and even his youngest son overcoming the odds while on holiday in Greece. Musically it's a mixed palette. *A Mountain Of Sky,* for instance, juggles flecks of jazz with 70s prog keyboard licks before going on a reggae detour; *Back2Back* wouldn't sound out of place on an 80s pop compilation; and *In Deep Blue (Sea Songs Pt 1)* washes over with waves of melody and harmony. Propped up by plenty of guest cameos, this is a band doing what they please, while always keeping the song as their beating heart.

"I tend to write about world issues and the human condition," Manning says. "What I tend to do is to try and put a character in the centre of it, like the farmer in *Americana* who is battling to keep his farm alive against climate change in Missouri. So it's all his song — he's singing it, so you can empathise with his point of view. I feel strongly about quite a lot of things, that's why people say I'm a bit preachy. I can't paint, so it's all I've got. That's the way I express myself. I'd like to write a book one day, but I don't think that's really me. Music is probably my medium for getting the message across."



Sean Timms has played on, mixed and mastered Damanek's new album.

DAMIEN STEELE SCOTT

"We had a whole raft of problems from one thing after another. Just getting the album finished has been stop-start, stop-start all the way along."

He's credited as writing Damanek's new album, and he's a chap whose musical DNA touches various corners of the spectrum. When it comes to musical inspiration, Manning name-checks Jethro Tull, Joni Mitchell, Steely Dan and Weather Report, as well as world music.

"I think what I write is like a big bucket with a stick. There's influences poured into it, and songs just turn out the way they turn out, because that's just the way the magic happens," he says. "I just let it evolve and hope it sounds good at the end, and hope other people think it sounds okay too."

Manning works up ideas in his home studio, conjuring up demos with programmed drums and music — "far too many instruments if you ask Sean, because I put everything and the kitchen sink into it". It's not a case of jamming out riffs as a band in a sweaty rehearsal room, energising off human connection, though. Damanek is truly an international affair — Manning lives in Yorkshire, Timms is over in Australia and Arnold is based in Germany. It means ideas are floated around cyberspace, eventually landing down under in Adelaide for Timms — who runs a commercial studio making jingles for big brands and happened to land a lucrative contract for a "well-known streaming company" in the middle of the album process — to mix and master.

"When people say, 'Are you playing live?' Hmm, let me think about that," Manning adds. "We have one German, one Australian and one Yorkshireman. It's not that easy to get us all together."

With budgets remaining modest, is there a frustration then that Damenek can't yet go out and promote their new album on tour?

"It's all very well this beautiful image of the band being on the road: a lovely tour coach with the roadies going on ahead and setting up all the screens and lighting — not for us, I'm afraid," Manning says with an edged humour. "We're a small, independent band in an increasingly growing market of other bands all competing against each other to try and get our five minutes in the spotlight before we become yesterday's fish and chip paper."

(Wood)wind beneath his wings: multi-instrumentalist Marek Arnold.

RALF ROJE

But the hope is to play live some day, if the stars, and schedules, align.

"This year is a sort of a hiatus for us, but Sean is busy," Manning adds. "In terms of where you could take the album, I'm not sure there's much more we can do other than to have produced the best thing we could possibly have done within our capability. I think the people who like us like us, and the people who don't like us don't like us. I think we've probably picked up some fans with this new album, because it's gone down remarkably well. The other two went down really well as well. The trouble is to go down critically well is wonderful and as an artist and the guys in the band, we love to hear that people like us. But does that transfer into sales? Probably not. A lot of people like it, but they'll be running off to some sort of site in Russia to get their copy.

"People are saying they think it's the best yet, which is lovely to hear. But we're not going to be able to suddenly go, 'Wow this is the album, we're all going to retire and live off the proceeds and buy ourselves a tour bus and do a world tour on the back of it.'"

Making Shore is out now via GEP. See www.damanek.com for more information.

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Lords Of The Ages

Formed in London in 1969, **Magna Carta** went on to become one of the UK's best-loved progressive folk bands. They could even count David Bowie among their fans. Following the release of their multidisc career retrospective, *When All Is Said And Done*, founder member and singer-songwriter Chris Simpson discusses their legacy, working with Davey Johnstone, and that time he got into trouble with The Beach Boys' security team…

Words: James McNair **Image:** Michael Putland/Getty Images

Where improbable tales from rock's annals are concerned, Magna Carta's story fits the bill. They had encounters with ghosts, David Bowie and human entrails; and gigs in the Gaza Strip, Kathmandu and even the Amazon Rainforest. "I look back and think: how did it all happen?" says the group's amiable linchpin Chris Simpson. "It does seem like a bit of a dream."

Eighty-one in July, Simpson is chatting to *Prog* from his home in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. Upbeat despite a nasty cough and recent bouts with Covid and pneumonia, he reports, "It's a lovely snowy morning, and adds that he's "currently lying down". Mention Magna Carta's 1970 prog-folk masterpiece *Seasons*, or even 1973's *Lord Of The Ages* — "One of the greatest albums of its kind ever made," Rick Wakeman has averred — and Simpson's natural ebullience grows. Magna Carta remain a cult band, and having led them for more than five decades he seems delighted that someone still cares.

With the Australian-born Lyell Tranter on second guitar and former *Z Cars* actor Glen Stuart on co-vocals, Simpson formed Magna Carta in Hampstead, north London

"After we'd finished, David [Bowie] said, 'That was one of the most beautiful things I've ever heard.'"

in April 1969. His studies at King's College had qualified him to be an Anglican priest, but taken with The Lovin' Spoonful, Chuck Berry and folk luminaries such as Bob Dylan, Simpson effectively 'defrocked' himself and pursued music instead.

Today he speaks of the serendipity of that time, of how easy it was to meet like-minded people. Tranter, an able, classically trained player, left his phone number on a note he placed in Simpson's guitar case at a party, while Glen Stuart — an Afghan coat-wearing, patchouli-oil scented singer with a four-octave range — was recruited via an ad in *Melody Maker*. A chance encounter with Radio Luxembourg's Brian Shepherd led to the trio recording their eponymous debut album for Mercury, but not before a change of moniker.

"We were originally called Village," explains Simpson, "but there was already another band of that name. I'd always loved English history and when I suggested the name Magna Carta Brian Shepherd said, 'That's it!' He thought it would be easy to remember since everybody learns about the Magna Carta at school."

Pentagle's then-bassist Danny Thompson was a featured session player on *Magna Carta*. Extremely taken with the band, he even wrote the record's sleeve notes.

"Yes, Danny was one of the fountainheads of our early success," says Simpson. "He got us support slots with Pentangle and introduced me to [guitarist] Bert Jansch. We used to love going to their rehearsals, because they were organised alcoholic chaos!"

Simpson grew up in a 16th-century stone cottage in rural Nidderdale, North Yorkshire. Living without electricity, he loved to read by candlelight and works by Dickens, Steinbeck and Hemingway fired his imagination. He's always remained immensely proud of his roots and locals he knew from childhood found their way into songs on Magna Carta's debut. *Old John Parker*, for example, was actually about Albert Brown, a gardener who'd let Simpson smoke tea leaves in his pipe, while *Emily Thru' The Windowpane*

Making history: Magna Carta onstage at Aldershot Civic Hall, 1973. L-R: Chris Simpson, Glen Stuart, Stan Gordon.

concerned a certain Agnes Herring, a lonely old woman Simpson encountered each day while briefly working as a postman.

"I've always liked old people and now I am one," he says with a laugh.

More intriguing, though – and certainly more gruesome – is the story behind *Ballad Of Francis Alabadalejo*, a deceptively pretty waltz ornamented by Danny Thompson's able bass.

"Ah yes," says Simpson. "Francis was a lovely, bouncy little Spaniard who used to chase after nurses when I worked as a post-mortem assistant at the Royal Free in London. We had to take bits of bodies, innards if you like, out of the morgue and across the road for disposal. Francis was a hospital porter, and one day a parcel he was transporting spilled open and out came heads, fingers, bits of this, bits of that. Poor Francis just screamed and never came back!"

In time, Magna Carta's prowess as a live act won them other influential fans. A gig supporting Pentangle at London's Lyceum Theatre early in 1970 proved fateful when audience member Gus Dudgeon – then fresh from producing David Bowie's landmark 1969 single *Space Oddity* – expressed an interest in overseeing their second album, *Seasons*.

Featuring a young Tony Visconti's string and brass arrangements, and recorded at Trident Studios, *Seasons* was a huge step up for Simpson and his bandmates, both sonically and in terms of its vision. All quaint narrative sections and sweet Simon & Garfunkel-like vocal harmonies, 22-minute opener *Seasons* was very much of its time: an innocent, yet strangely haunting pastoral piece with spacey, quintessentially English evocations of flora and fauna. Elsewhere on the album, a young Rick Wakeman contributed organ and piano.

"*Seasons* was a concept album about the changing landscapes on my beloved Yorkshire Dales," Simpson tells *Prog*. "I wrote the lyrics on the backs of cornflakes packets that I turned inside-out. After our first, rather DIY album with Brian Shepherd, it was incredible to record where The Beatles had recorded *Hey Jude*."

Visconti, in particular, got on swimmingly with Magna Carta.

"One day he invited us down to his amazing house in Beckenham," says Simpson. "He wanted us to play for a friend of his. When we got there he said, 'Don't be disturbed if you see a young girl wandering across the lawn – she's a ghost and she's been here for years.'"

Visconti's "friend", meanwhile, turned out to be David Bowie accompanied by his then-wife, Angie.

"So we played *Seasons* for them, just two acoustic guitars and voices. After we'd finished, David said, 'That was one of the most beautiful things I've ever heard.'"

One of the best songs on *Seasons* is *Airport Song*, a hit single in various territories, which worked its magic via a gossamer string-arrangement and sparkling flute motifs.

"Its horrendous original title was *Heathrow Fogbound*," laughs Simpson, "but it turned out to be an important song for us."

As with most bands, Magna Carta were soon subject to the first of many line-up changes. Simpson had been blown away by Davey Johnstone's mandolin playing with Draught Porridge at The Cambridge Folk Festival, and after the gifted Scot played some session guitar and sitar on *Seasons*, he became the obvious choice to succeed an increasingly disgruntled Lyell Tranter, who would soon return to Oz.

When Tranter died in 2022, Simpson wrote touchingly about him on Magna Carta's website, so naturally he treads carefully when *Prog* asks about Tranter's leaving the band way back when.

"Lyell was a smashing guy and I loved him to bits, but there were a lot of reasons for his departure that I can't go into fully. We weren't earning much money, plus he had fallen for a lovely lady who said she was pregnant by him, but wasn't. Let's just say that there were other complications between Glen and Lyell as well..."

Meanwhile, Johnstone's first album as an official member was 1971's *Songs From Wasties Orchard*. It's perhaps some measure of the Scotsman's impact that it was named after the street in Long Hanborough, Oxfordshire where he was living at the time.

"Davey was a killer musician – still is," says Simpson. "Plus now we had great three-part harmonies: listen to *Time For The Leaving*. Davey later got snapped up by Elton John, but boy, did we have a lot of adventures together in the meantime."

The original line-up with Chris Simpson (top), Lyell Tranter (middle) and Glen Stuart (bottom). Left: Magna Carta's 1969 eponymous debut album.

COURTESY OF CHRIS SIMPSON/MAGANA CARTA ARCHIVES

***Seasons* (1970).**

***Songs From Wasties Orchard* ('71).**

Roger Dean's cover for the Rick Wakeman-approved *Lord Of The Ages* (1973).

COURTESY OF CHRIS SIMPSON/MAGANA CARTA ARCHIVES

Chris has always been immensely proud of his Yorkshire roots.

Indeed they did. There was a performance of *Seasons* at the Royal Albert Hall with jazz musician John Dankworth, who had scored The Royal Philharmonic's accompaniment; then at a theatre in Zwolle, Holland, poor Johnstone was electrocuted onstage and insisted he had to go "back out there right away". And then there was a rambunctious, whisky-fuelled tour of Scottish castles while they were all recording music for the BBC "light entertainment" series *Castles In The Air*.

Equally memorable, perhaps, was the time Magna Carta returned to the RAH to support The Beach Boys. Fired up by his dad shouting encouragement from the crowd, Johnstone played a virtuosic banjo version of traditional Scots reel *The Mason's Apron*, and The Beach Boys' enraptured audience screamed for more.

"So we're heading back for an encore," says Simpson, "and suddenly we're surrounded by The Beach Boys' minders, these very big, very aggressive men. The biggest one said, 'If you get back up on that stage it'll be the last fucking thing you ever do.' I said [playfully], 'There's no need to be rude.' He said, 'I'll be as rude as I fucking like. Now fuck off!'"

There isn't space here to parse the many works that various incarnations of Magna Carta released between *...Wasties Orchard* and recent box set *When All Is Said And Done*, but one of the band's most treasured chapters came in the early-to-mid 80s, long after their heyday. Approached by a representative of ambassadorial body The British Council at a folk festival in Norway, the group were pleased to hear of their "universal appeal". But when a brigadier from The British Council phoned some weeks later they were surprised.

"He was a very clued-up man, actually," he says. "I realised later he was screening me very carefully. He said, 'How do you chaps fancy playing in the Himalayas and Bangladesh, then on through the rest of the Indian subcontinent?' He thought we might be busy and I didn't say that we weren't, of course. I remember he finished with the wonderful phrase, 'Don't worry, we'll pay your train fare.'"

Magna Carta ended up doing 29 tours with The British Council. They played in Nicaragua, Venezuela and the Amazon Rainforest, and Chris shared a pot of Turkish coffee with Yasser Arafat on the Gaza Strip.

"What a sad situation that was," he recalls. "I saw people being treated very badly."

And what of now, wonders *Prog*? It's late in the day, but it was only last autumn that the current Magna Carta line-up's sold-out dates in Holland resulted in a series of standing ovations. Is there time for one last hurrah?

"Well, me and my wife Cathy will be spending the weekend on our narrowboat on the canal at Skipton [North Yorkshire]," teases Simpson, laughing then wheezing, "but I'm not closing the door. The problem is I can't play guitar like I used to. I've got arthritis and I'm very achy. Plus getting Covid then pneumonia was a bit of a bugger, believe you me."

"I look back and think: how did it all happen? It does seem like a bit of a dream."

Prog lets the weight of that statement settle for a second, then assures Simpson that it's been a great privilege talking with him.

As for Magna Carta's legacy, how does the musician hope his lifelong pursuit will be remembered in the future? "As one of the best bands in the world, both lyrically and musically," he says assuredly. Amen to that.

***When All Is Said And Done* (2022).**

When All Is Said And Done is out now via Repertoire Records. See www.magnacarta-music.com for more information.

Better Late Than Never

After splitting in 2012, Australia's **The Butterfly Effect**'s classic line-up are back with *IV*, their first album in 14 years. But does absence make the heart grow fonder? *Prog* catches up with guitarist Kurt Goedhart from the forward-thinking rockers to find out.

Words: Chris Cope **Images:** Kane Hibberd

The Butterfly Effect, L-R: Clint Boge, Ben Hall, Glenn Esmond, Kurt Goedhart.

"The relationships got to a point where I think they were on the brink of decaying into something nasty," The Butterfly Effect singer Clint Boge was quoted as saying back in 2012 after he left the group. "I thought I would pull the pin before it got to that point."

Maybe it was a case of absence making the heart fonder, or just four guys growing up, but now the reunited Australian heavy prog group appear to be back on an even keel, and perhaps stronger than ever. Their comeback album, *IV*, released last autumn, marked a turnaround of fortunes for a band who had teetered on the brink and were scalded by toxicity.

It's now been 15 years since their previous long-player, *Final Conversation Of Kings*. A heck of a lot has happened since then: Obama, Trump, #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, Brexit, King Charles III... But the time since their split has provided a cathartic breathing space to allow the quartet's wounds to heal.

"I don't think there was any one spark," guitarist Kurt Goedhart tells *Prog* down the line from Brisbane when asked what brought The Butterfly Effect's classic line-up back together. "We all had a very special experience with what we had back then, and enough time had passed for us to get back into it. You live really close to each other, you're travelling in a van, you get out of the van and get onstage, we're sharing rooms together. So we're sleeping together, travelling together, playing together... We just needed some space. Some space was the spark. Once we experienced the space we were ready to get back into it."

The Butterfly Effect are a band who, before their split, managed to notch three gold-selling records in their home country — two of which cracked Australia's Top 5 — while not compromising their sound. From 2003 debut *Begins Here* to *Final Conversation*... — and now *IV* — the group, completed by drummer Ben Hall and bassist Glenn Esmond, have seen their writing progressively refined to offer more freedom and more depth. The opening title track of their latest, fourth record is a fine barometer, offering atmospheric swell sweetened by strings.

"I used to think you need tension to write good music, but there's no tension there. Our communication is better than ever."

The Butterfly Effect are often mentioned in the same breath as Karnivool and Dead Letter Circus; they recently toured with Caligula's Horse and some of their melancholic riffing has copped comparisons to Deftones. But, despite the brooding atmosphere and the nods to adventurism, the fuel that powers the engine room is the melody, the song.

"We had a goal at the start to write something that was simple, hard, heavy and dark," Goedhart says about the process behind *IV*. "I think we achieved that. As soon as we'd get to a middle bit and start waffling, we'd be like, 'Stop this, no more! Simplify, simplify.' I'm not too intimate with other markets, but in Australia we're sort of lacking that sort of music. Simple, straight-ahead hard rock with a great catchy goal. That was always the goal. I was very satisfied that we got there."

The record was pieced together at different studios over three years, and some ideas stemmed from old demos. An absence of touring meant the quartet's full focus was on writing and recording with no distractions.

"It's just bits and pieces that we sort of went, 'That's a shit-hot riff, let's start there and put a 2022 vibe on it,'" the guitarist explains. "We Frankensteined a few bits together like that."

Goedhart and drummer Hall, who are founding members, never stopped writing together while the band were dormant, creating a "shit-ton" of material to cherry-pick moments from: "It was invigorating; all the relationships were new again, everyone's had a break from each other, a whole bunch of new ideas, everyone's a bit more grown up — well, most of us," he says with a smile.

The vibe within the band is markedly different this time around. Not least because the pressure is off — "It's not paying the bills anymore" — but they're also completely independent, with no ties to a label or management firm. The comeback record is self-funded, and it appears they've had enough of outside influence. "We've been there, done that," Goedhart says matter-of-factly.

"You live really close to each other, you're travelling in a van, you get out of the van and get onstage, we're sharing rooms together. We just needed some space."

From chaos reborn: the Aussie lads are back together again.

Despite the positivity, there's no getting away from the huge bump in the road, back in 2012, when Boge packed his bags. The rest of the group battled on with replacement vocalist Paul Galagher, touring and releasing one single, before calling it quits a few years later. But it wasn't long until they began yearning to rediscover past glories, and by 2018 the line-up was back on the road in Australia. The lead single on the new album, *Unbroken*, could perhaps shine a light on regrets about the past: '*The deeper the wounds, the scars will remain/ Only the hands of time will hold us/Go back, hit rewind*,' Boge sings.

"It's comfortable," Goedhart explains when asked if the band are in a better place now than they were before. "I used to think you need tension to write good music, but there's no tension there. Our communication is better than ever, especially between the three writing members. It's a lot better than tension. Rather than awkward silences we can openly talk to each other: 'I don't think that represents that very good,' or 'That's shit', or 'Kurt, that's a shit riff', 'Kurt that's great.' We never had that openness in our writing before, so that's more important I've realised now than any tension. That definitely helps the writing process a lot better. It moves things along a lot more swiftly, rather than letting it stew in a pot for around three months before you can actually say anything, then when you do say something you say it wrong because it's been stewing for so long. Now we can, as the moment arrives, communicate honestly and openly with each other."

With the gaping chasm of time between albums three and four, there could have been an inevitable pressure gnawing away at the psyche. But will the new material satisfy fans' expectations, and has that inner tension dissipated? The initial response to *IV* seems to have put paid to any of those fears, but within the band there was no weight of expectation.

"You don't sit around the room and write for your fans, do you?" Goedhart says. "I have to listen to [the music] more than anyone else. I'll write whatever I want to listen to. I think I say that on behalf of everyone in the band. By the time you hear the song, I've had to listen to it probably 1,500 times. I guess the only person we're thinking of while we're writing is ourselves and whether we're happy with it. We're not a band in a bubble looking out, we're always looking in.

"You write what you like, you know? You don't write what someone else likes, that would be absolutely ridiculous. That's not very sincere music if you're writing for what someone else likes."

But the foursome were at least keen to make an impression test-driving their new material out on the road. "We rehearsed a fucking lot, because we were really nervous about it," the guitarist admits. "We played the songs hundreds of times before we went out there."

By the time *IV* reaches its closer, *Visiting Hours*, it's clear that one chapter in The Butterfly Effect's history has closed, but a whole new one is just about to open.

"We're not doing it for anything. We don't have to do it to pay the mortgage or anything," Goedhart replies when asked if there was anxiety the reunion might not work. "It's just music. If it feels good, fuck it."

IV is out now. For more information, see www.thebutterflyeffectband.com.au.

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All together now: Solstice unite to *Light Up* the room.

Indian Summer

After 40 years, most bands' creative conduits are starting to falter. Cue albums carelessly cobbled together with filler and releases that are pitiful imitations of earlier halcyon days. Yet Solstice appear to be regenerating with a musical vigour that's surprising both their fanbase and band alike.

"It's extraordinary and feels like a complete rebirth," says guitarist and founding member Andy Glass. "It really feels like a new band. We had our heyday in the early 80s and we've just done the odd album ever since. But I kept it going here and there, so for this to be happening again is just amazing."

Glass makes an astute point. Since their 1984 debut, *Silent Dance*, they've averaged a long-player every five years, with sporadic live appearances placing a tangible doubt on their commitment. But since 2020's *Sia*, the desire to record and perform live has returned. This sudden burst of inspiration was ignited by the line-up changes that occurred in 2019, as Glass explains.

"I remember our keyboard player, Steve [McDaniel] asking what we were doing and

“It’s the first time since the early days that I’ve felt ambitious. I’m motivated because we’re all loving playing together and I think we’re doing our best work.”

On their latest release, *Light Up*, **Solstice** are continuing the trilogy they began on their 2020 comeback album, *Sia*. With an armful of new tunes and their current line-up fully ensconced, founding guitarist Andy Glass discusses creative freedom, the joy of playing live and finding the motivation to keep carrying on.

Words: Rich Wilson **Images:** Laurent Veigal

what was happening,” he recalls. “The truth was that I was really lacking a creative partner, the sort of muse I had with [violinist] Marc Elton back in the day. I was disappointed with *Prophecy* [2013] and felt it was time to make a change. Getting Jess Holland involved on vocals really has changed the game; she’s a very fine musician and brings a lot to the table. She gets the music in a way that none of the other singers have since the days of [third vocalist] Sandy Leigh. Jess is full of ideas, really embraces the music and she gets what it’s about. So, for me, it’s a creative partnership again that hasn’t really existed since 1985. Plus, she’s a great singer and it turns out she’s amazing live too.”

The freedom offered away from past lockdowns that blighted the writing session for *Sia* enabled a more collaborative, in-person writing process for their latest release, *Light Up*. Additionally, Solstice were able to perform many of the tracks live prior to recording, allowing them to iron out any niggles before setting them to record. It’s a notion that recalls the early 80s, when countless prog bands — including Solstice — were able to spend months honing tracks on the live circuit.

“Exactly, and that would be the ideal scenario for everyone,” agrees Glass. “On our first album, there was a big fight over what we were going to record because we had so much stuff. We had been playing them live for a couple of years at that point. With *Sia*, we recorded the whole album but Jess had never met the band. Now, we’ve had a couple of years of playing live together and working it out onstage. We could finally work together in the same space and people have remarked that the album has a more organic feel to it. It feels a bit like the band are playing in the room and that has made a difference. It’s been a really nice progression from *Sia*, really. The way it worked with both albums is that I’d put demos together and then the guys would work on parts. I’m not a keyboard player, so Steve very often gets a blank slate and just has to come up with ideas, with no real direction from me. I can programme the basic ideas and then musicians have to take it to where they think it should go. It really is a band effort.”

Creatively, the band are in a position that will undoubtedly create envy in many acts. While still maintaining their progressive, free-festival vibe, there’s no expectation from their fans that their music has to firmly remain in that style. As a consequence, Solstice are freed from notional restrictions to continually attempt to recreate the sounds that solidified their approach some five decades ago.

“I don’t have any agenda at all when writing and don’t feel that I consciously need to go in any particular direction,” he says. “It’s just whatever sounds good to me that gets me going. There’s no point in doing it otherwise. It’s self-indulgent but fortunately people are responding well to it. I think I have to take a leaf out of Steven Wilson’s book. Although you hope the audience like it, you’re really not writing for them. There’s some good music on this album and I don’t know where it comes from. I think it’s easier to write when you’ve a good reason to do it and you’re motivated. It seems to appear from somewhere. For me, writing comes from two different places. Very often, it’ll be just a snippet of something that I hear that inspires me to want to do something like that. Sometimes, I can trace some of the songs back to what originally inspired me. They are pretty much unrelated to the end result, it’s just something that gets you started. Or I might just be playing around on the guitar and then you come up with a little hook of something. I will just record that little hook and think what do I want to hear next? Obviously, some ideas go nowhere, so I’ve got a whole load of stuff with ridiculous file names that aren’t finished. That is where *Wongle No9* on the current album came from — it was just a ridiculous file name that stuck.”

Music aside, there's also the harsher financial realities of surviving as a progressive band, remaining able to make music and perform live on a regular basis. It's a struggle that can affect even the big names, but Solstice are proving that with foresight, careful accounting and the backing of loyal fans, they can remain viable as a band.

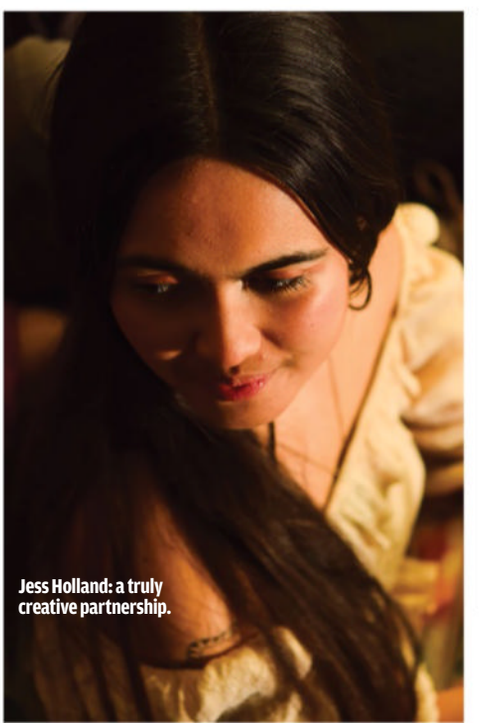
"Like all other musicians, I still have to earn money and, of course, making original music just doesn't make any money," he chuckles. "I'm just devoting myself to try and get us out there and make connections with promoters. Every successful band has someone who is really driven and I'm that man. It's the first time since the early days that I've felt ambitious. I'm motivated because we're all loving playing together and I think we're doing our best work. That's really inspiring for me. It's also a learning process to try to find ways to make the band sustainable. A lot of people have done a Patreon-style subscription model and we've done it too. It's enough to keep the wheels oiled and we've got some fantastic, dedicated supporters. It's a combination of the right band, the music coming good, someone to drive it and having the community to support it. Of course, it's still small-time but that's not the point. We're making music and people are responding to it in a very rewarding and humbling way."

"The truth was that I was really lacking a creative partner, the sort of muse I had with Marc Elton back in the day."

L-R: Steven McDaniel, Jenny Newman, Pete Hemsley, Andy Glass, Robin Phillips, Jess Holland, Ebony Buckle.

That overt optimism has led to a continued flurry of activity, with plans being made for live dates this summer, as well as an appearance at Cropredy 2023 in August. Negotiations are already underway for festival appearances as far ahead as 2025, as well as developing ideas for the writing of another studio album.

"Cropredy is exciting, and they've put us on late afternoon, when we may be playing to 15,000 people," enthuses Glass. "I do think there's a big audience out there for what we're doing. It's just the age-old problem of how you access them. My mission is to keep pushing to build our live profile and presence. I want to get cracking on another album, as I have this dream of doing the *Sia* trilogy. We had *Sia*, now we have *Light Up* and musically they're connected. I feel this is a new life and the third album is when the band hits the sweet spot. Then we're going to move on and become really big..."

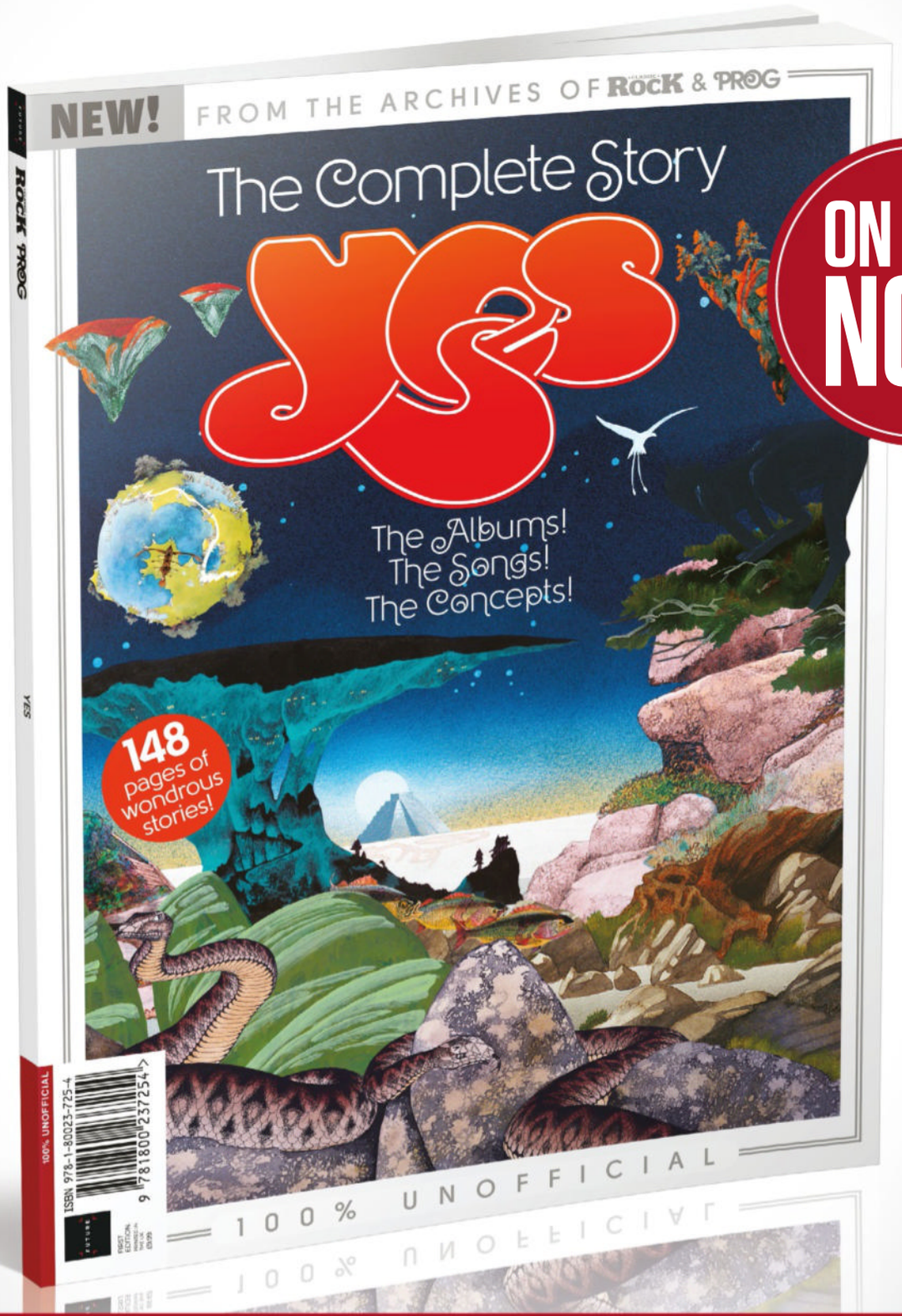


Jess Holland: a truly creative partnership.

Light Up is out now via GEP. See www.solsticeprog.uk for more information.

THE STORY OF ONE OF ROCK'S MOST UNDERRATED BANDS

From the making of such landmark albums as *Fragile*, *Close To The Edge* and *90125*, to up-close-and-personal interviews with Jon Anderson, Steve Howe, Rick Wakeman and the late, great Chris Squire, this is an epic tribute to one of the most influential prog bands of all time.



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"I remember wondering how many people could really get into this progressive, extreme violin metal stuff? Literally one week after *Portal Of I* came out, we were contacted by Season Of Mist saying, 'We want to offer you a record deal for the next album.'"
Tim Charles

In Exile

In 2014, **Ne Obliviscaris** ventured into unchartered waters and launched a crowd-funding campaign that enabled them to finance a world tour, something no other band in the world has achieved. As they now gear up to release their fourth album, *Exul*, they explain the emotional story of its conception.

Words: Cheri Faulkner **Images:** Matteo Ermeti

"Xen's secretly a vampire, he's 463 years old!" chuckles Tim Charles, Ne Obliviscaris' violinist and 'clean' singer. "If you see photos of him from 20 years ago, he pretty much looks the same," he continues.

The photos Charles is referring to come from the band's conception – they're now in their 20th year – and he's right. Harsh vocalist/lyricist Marc 'Xenoyr' Campbell, also known as Xen, exudes an ethereal glow sitting on a regal gothic throne in his home for our interview, having not appeared to have aged a day since then.

"On his birthday every year on social media it's become a tradition of asking fans to send him rainbows and unicorns because we've also never seen him wear anything except for black in the last 20 years," Charles laughs.

Campbell shakes his head and confirms, "My inbox is an abomination. It's terrible."

It's this lighthearted banter yet clear, deep admiration between the band members that's contributed to the success of Ne Obliviscaris. As Campbell and Charles sit down with *Prog* for their first interview since 2017's *Urn*, the topic quickly arises of the band's formation two decades ago and how they came to be.

"Tim and myself are ultimately the last of the founding members of the band," Campbell nods. The pair met on an online metal forum where Campbell had mentioned starting a band.

No sparkling vampires round here... just the odd dusting.

"I saw that you were online talking about strings in metal and I contacted you asking if you'd be interested," he recounts to Charles. "I'm trying to do something. I have zero experience. 'Come along to rehearsal and see if you're interested,'" he smirks.

Charles recalls the event without a moment's hesitation, "Yes!" he exclaims, smiling, "I remember I played a violin solo from a song called *Angina* by Tristania, and Xen knew the song and was really impressed that this violinist knew this fairly obscure song."

That mutual knowledge and common ground progressed from that moment to become the true foundation of today's version of Ne Obliviscaris.

"It's music with beautiful extremes," Campbell says.

"It's intense in many different directions," Charles agrees. "It's not quickly digested. If you listen to it once, you're only going to get part of it. You've got to listen to it multiple times to appreciate everything that's going on."

The two agree that Ne Obliviscaris are extreme progressive metal mixed in with elements of black metal, classical and even jazz, as Charles explains: "There are plenty of people we know where we're the most extreme band they listen to but they got hooked by a section of a song that wasn't metal. Plus, you know, not all bands have a violinist."

Campbell laughs and adds, "All the mothers like Tim."

It's not been an easy road though, as Charles confirms that for the first nine years, they didn't really get anywhere: "The 2003 line-up all fell apart very quickly. Within about 12 months the entire band changed."

Matt Klavins (rhythm guitar) joined the Australian six-piece in 2004, but according to Charles, "a lot of it was just by chance". "We got Benjamin Baret [lead guitar] across from France in 2008," he adds, "As well as Martino Garattoni, who is our bassist from Italy." The band, as Charles points out, is international with half of the members in Australia and the other half dotted around Europe.

Following their nine-year struggle to get anywhere, Charles notes that the 2012 release of *Portal Of I* saw significant growth for Ne Obliviscaris.

"It's been really pleasing and exciting to watch because with each record, more opportunities get offered to us and it's been really gratifying after that first decade where we didn't really get anywhere," he smiles.

In fact, *Portal Of I* was their first album release, Campbell recalls. "A lot of people that are new listeners to us only think that we've been around for 10 years because of that," he laughs, "They don't realise we'd done 10 years of hard work before the first album."

Since the time that *Portal Of I* was released, the band members believed they would remain a very underground band. Charles explains, "I remember wondering how many people could really get into this progressive, extreme violin metal stuff? Literally one week after *Portal Of I* came out we were contacted by Season Of Mist saying, 'We want to offer you a record deal for the next album.' We'd spent nine years trying to get anywhere and within one week we already had a record deal for the next three albums."

He gives credit to the international nature of Season Of Mist as a record label for their ability to then hire booking agents in the USA and Europe.

"We were getting offers to do overseas tours when *Citadel* came out [in 2014]." The only problem was that, at that time, there was no money in the pot to fund those tours. That's when Ne Obliviscaris decided to do what no band had successfully done before, and launched a crowdfunding campaign to fund an international tour. It was set up with the intention of raising $40,000AUD (around £23,000), and Charles explains that the goal was met within just 38 hours of launch.

Shortly afterwards, in 2016, the band launched a successful Patreon account, which offers multilevel subscriptions at varying amounts per month that fans can opt in to in order to receive exclusive first listens to new music, merch, early access to tour tickets and more. At the time this was unusual, but since the pandemic this trend has been widespread among bands and executed to varying degrees of success.

"We were the first band in the world to use that as a way of making a living," Charles explains, confirming that their Patreon does well enough to pay each member a full-time wage so they can focus all their time on the band.

"We were expecting a bit of backlash for [earning a living via crowdfunding]. But if you care too much what people think, you're never going to get anywhere."
Marc 'Xenoyr' Campbell

"We were expecting a bit of backlash for that," Campbell says, "but if you care too much what people think, you're never going to get anywhere."

There was so much encouragement that he explains they forged ahead, and reminded people that it was not mandatory for anyone to contribute.

"Weirdly enough, it was the industry more so than the fans where the backlash came from," Charles continues. "With our fans the response was enormously positive."

New album *Exul* was delayed from 2020 and the pair explain that it was down to factors that stemmed from multiple lockdowns.

"We were all planning to be in one place to record in the USA with Mark Lewis, and Dan [Presland] had gone over to record drums. He made it back into Australia before they closed the borders by about 10 hours. Everyone else obviously couldn't leave the country, so we recorded everyone at separate locations," Campbell describes. *Exul* ended up being recorded at 10 different studios over two and a half years.

That uncertainty didn't lead to a lack of productivity or any compromise on the final result though, despite the members having not seen each other for many years.

"We haven't been in the same room since June 2019 because of all the border closures," Charles explains. "The government was just making it up on the spot!"

Exul, which literally translates to 'exile', was written in the pre-pandemic period, although certain elements naturally developed through that lockdown phase.

"I think it actually helped the end result," Campbell says, with Charles adding, "Xen and I often write stuff last. An example is the violin solo at the end of *Graal* – I recorded violins a year later than expected and I wrote them in the studio."

"For me personally, I feel like the pandemic impacted my performance," Charles continues. "When you're going through so much, you use that energy to connect to the song and the performance and I think that definitely came through on this record."

Campbell agrees, mentioning that the themes of the album are varied but all handle issues of unwanted departures, with the first single, *Equus*, inspired by the Australian bush fires of 2019. Those themes weren't predetermined ahead of the writing process, but Campbell explains that it came together that way.

"Everyone was dealing with living a different life, exiled from their normal way of living, and then you have a war that's happening. Coincidentally, it seemed to make sense to call the album 'Exul'."

Exul is out on March 24 via Season Of Mist. See www.neobliviscaris.com.au for more information.

Ne Obliviscaris, L-R: Tim Charles, Martino Garattoni, Matt Klavins, Benjamin Baret, Marc 'Xenoyr' Campbell.

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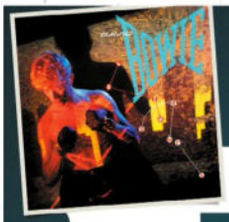

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Happy Trails

Five years after the release of his solo debut, *Innerland*, Engineers leader **Mark Peters** returns with *Red Sunset Dreams*. His second long-player combines his passion for Americana with an unexpected discovery about his home town in north-west England. *Prog* caught up with the musician to find out more.

Words: Emma Johnston
Portrait: Robin Clewley

The Wigan Little Theatre isn't the most obvious starting point for an album that combines intricate post-rock atmospherics with the melancholy soul and beauty of pedal steel-drenched Americana. Sitting opposite the bus station, the building plays host to an amateur dramatics company, which, when *Prog* joins Mark Peters via Zoom from his home in the town, is gearing up for a panto run of *Humpty Dumpty*. And yet this handsome, austere brick building was the initial inspiration for *Red Sunset Dreams*, the second solo record from the bassist and guitarist for British dreampop favourites Engineers.

During lockdown, the PRS Foundation approached him to work on a project called Wanderscapes, in which he and former Tangerine Dream musician Ulrich Schnauss mentored local musicians as they created musical pieces inspired by the buildings and landmarks of Wigan, including the theatre.

"I found out that first of all it was a Salvation Army hostel, and then it became a cinema in the early 1900s and apparently only showed westerns," he says. "I thought that was really interesting, because of the idea of people in this dense smog and depressing atmosphere going to escape into the American West."

This was the spark he needed to rediscover his native north-west of England as the gateway for country music. *Tamaroa*, a track from his new album, takes its name from a ship that, along with US sailors, brought the first banjos into the UK. *The Musical Box* pays tribute to a record shop — still going strong — where those same sailors would trade the records they'd brought with them. And the first song written for the album, *Golden Cloud*, is inspired by Roy Rogers and his horse Trigger, who somewhat improbably stayed at Liverpool's Adelphi Hotel together to a hero's welcome.

"There's a picture of him walking up the stairs with the horse," says Peters with a laugh. "I hope they had their own rooms."

Peters' love of Americana started when he was given *All Things Must Pass* by George Harrison for his 18th birthday, and he fell head over heels in love with pedal steel — *Golden Cloud* features a borrowed 1949 lap steel, which he shows off as proudly as a newborn. An interest in Gram Parsons followed, joined by Gene Clark, the Everly Brothers and Ricky Nelson. And then there were those films offering a tantalising glimpse into the Wild West.

"My dad was obsessed with Clint Eastwood films when I was young," says Peters. "So I had no choice in the matter really. The visual side of westerns is always massively interesting to me, you know, Monument Valley, all that kind of stuff. Vistas and wide-open spaces are always kind of inspirational to me. The guitarist from Simple Minds, Charlie Burchill, said once, as a producer and musician, it's your job to create a world. If you've done it, if it feels like a place that you go to, then you've done your job right. I always live by that maxim. To be somewhere that you almost go to rather than it's just a song that you listen to and it's done. It should stay with you a bit, really, if you're doing it right."

The result does, indeed, stay with you, at once haunting, beautiful and nostalgic for a lost America its listeners will never have experienced first-hand.

"It's your job to create a world. If you've done it, if it feels like a place that you go to, then you've done your job right."

"I think all of my music is a bit like that," he says. "I don't know if nostalgia is the right word, but maybe my idealistic view of things and just trying to recall a kind of a memory or halcyon days of some time that you felt good. I think for me that's what music is for. It's just like a kind of a daily self therapy, to get yourself into a good place the whole time. Thinking of things and places is just a way to do that."

While it's very much Peters' vision, it wasn't created in a vacuum. He worked closely with Sonic Cathedral boss Nathaniel Cramp, who helped to build the soundscapes into a narrative.

"I tend to be a little bit more scattershot about it, and he's great at that," he says. "And it was really good fun to work with someone. I've obviously worked with loads of people on a musical basis, and you develop the technicalities of songwriting and production. But to work with someone on a purely conceptual level was a new thing. We didn't know we'd wanted to do it, kind of him be the Tony Wilson. I gave him all the tracks, told him what the keys were and he sequenced it."

The album is also bookended with songs featuring ethereal vocals from Dot Allison, from Scottish trip hop group One Dove, who had previously covered Dolly Parton's *Jolene*, "so I kind of suspected that that would be something she would enjoy, and she was someone on the same sort of wavelength."

The final piece of the puzzle comes in the form of renowned pedal steel guitarist BJ Cole.

"With Dot, the first conversation we had, we talked about Gene Clark and Gram Parsons and Emmylou Harris. You don't really just bump into people and talk about that stuff. What I didn't quite envisage was that she brought a lot to it lyrically. She created a protagonist, you know, it wasn't like, here's an album about Mark's ideas about westerns and country music, it created a character, which is a great way to set off on a journey. It's brilliant working with someone who's got that level of understanding and convert it into a reality. And BJ, I mean, the first note that you hear, you know it's him. I'm playing lap steel on it, but I feel a bit embarrassed that it's side by side with him, he's such an amazing player."

At the moment there are no real plans for Engineers (who last released an album in 2020) and Peters is enjoying the freedom of working away from the pressures of a big label, instead going straight to the fans with his solo work.

"Engineers is just me and whoever wants to join in. It has been since 2010. So it depends who can put up with me."

In the meantime, he's stretching his creating wings to stunning effect, introducing the world to the Wigan version of the Wild West.

Red Sunset Dreams is out now via Sonic Cathedral and The Magic Hour EP is out on March 24. See www.linktr.ee/mark_peters for more information.

THE PROG INTERVIEW

PHILIP SELWAY

Every month we get inside the mind of one of the biggest names in music. This issue it's **Philip Selway**. The drummer met his Radiohead bandmates while still at school and has since contributed to and performed on all their albums from *Pablo Honey* to 2016's *A Moon Shaped Pool*, as well as playing a key role in their recent reissues. In 2010, he released his debut solo album, *Familial*, and has also branched out into soundtrack work for film and ballet. His most recent long-player, *Strange Dance*, finds him forging new musical partnerships as well as reconnecting with longtime collaborators for 10 ambitious new songs. *Prog* catches up with the British musician to discuss his solo work and the future of Radiohead.

Strange Dance is out now.

Words: Rob Hughes **Portrait:** Phil Sharp

Barely two days into the recording sessions for his new album, Philip Selway sacked the drummer. This would usually indicate a bullish personality, monster ego or someone with impossibly demanding working methods. Probably all three. Except that Selway is none of those things. The drummer he dismissed happened to be himself. As it goes, it's a pretty good illustration of the 55-year-old's devotion to the bigger picture. Selway has always been about the communal cause, be it as one fifth of Radiohead, collaborative soundtrack composer or solo artist. As *Prog* quickly discovers during the course of our interview, the thoughtful and self-effacing Selway – a man who exudes the kind of quiet confidence that presumably comes with being a member of one of the biggest bands on the planet – is primarily concerned with the unexpected thrills of the creative process.

Born in Oxfordshire, Selway first met his future Radiohead bandmates at Abingdon School during the 80s. Prior to their signing to EMI in 1991, he studied English and history at Liverpool Polytechnic and worked for a time as a teacher, as well as playing drums for various touring musicians. Selway had been a budding songwriter in his teens, but decided to direct his energies into the democratic ethos of Radiohead, where writing credits were split equally.

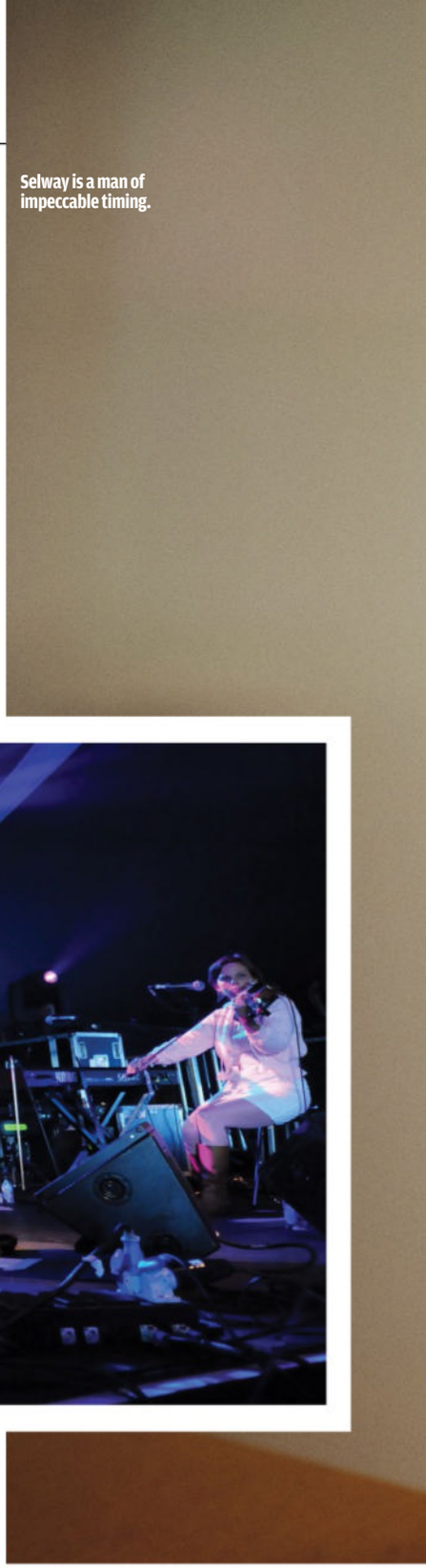
> "That very formative stage with King Crimson, Pink Floyd and everything else was still in there. Also, with Radiohead, I guess we've kind of drawn on those elements as well at various points – that kind of musical ambition, the scope and the soundscapes."

His drumming style evolved as the band did. Early, rock-ish 90s albums *Pablo Honey*, *The Bends* and *OK Computer* gave way to experimental treasures of 2000's *Kid A*, *Amnesiac* (2001) and *The King Of Limbs* (2011), with Selway embracing programming and a more nuanced, fluid approach. The only constants were his sure-fire rhythmic feel and his impeccable timing.

On A Friday, December 1991. The band changed their name to Radiohead soon afterwards.

RUPERT ELVIN/RETNA PICTURES/AVALON

From *Pablo Honey* to *Strange Dance*, Philip Selway has enjoyed an eclectic career so far.



Selway is a man of impeccable timing.

The same sense of curiosity has fuelled his solo career. In 2009 Selway played drums, guitar and sang occasional vocals on 7 Worlds Collide's *The Sun Came Out*, Neil Finn's all-star charity project that also featured Radiohead cohort Ed O'Brien alongside Eddie Vedder, Johnny Marr, Lisa Germano and various members of Wilco, among others. The bit firmly between his teeth, Selway released his largely acoustic solo debut, *Familial*, the following year.

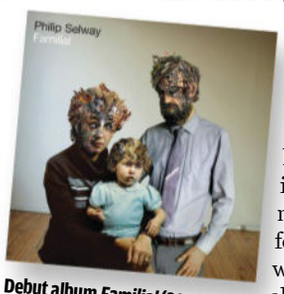
In 2014, *Weatherhouse* was a marked step up, the songs more detailed and ambitious, making use of electronica and a greater palette of textures. This was reflected in Selway's wider personnel, from the strings of The Elysian Quartet to multi-instrumentalists Quinta (aka London-based Katherine Mann) and Adem Ilhan, who also served as producer.

Now comes his best yet. *Strange Dance* is a beautiful collision of the formal and the abstract, a singer-songwriter album that manages to sound both epic and intimate. Selway has drawn upon his recent experiences composing scores for the Rambert Dance Company and film soundtracks for *Let Me Go* and *Carmilla* to remarkable effect, while also enlisting a bunch of proven-quality helpers including Hannah Peel, Adrian Utley, Laura Moody, Valentina Magaletti and the aforementioned Quinta.

"I had my collection of songs and I guess they felt like the kind of classic singer-songwriter thing, something that would've come out of Carole King and that whole scene," he enthuses, still buzzing at the results. *Prog* is eager to find out more.

How has your recent soundtrack work played into *Strange Dance*?

One of the key things that came out of that was working with the cellist Laura Moody. I'd first come across Laura when I was working on *Weatherhouse*, which she played on as part of The Elysium Quartet. And from there I started working with her on soundtrack projects for *Let Me Go* and *Carmilla*, and *Sea Longing* [Radio 3 play, 2018]. With *Strange Dance* I had arrangement ideas that I wanted to explore. I could take them so far myself, but working with Laura allowed that extra degree of flexibility and speed in the process. I saw the potential for having these bigger arrangements and how they could work in the context of my musical ideas. It still felt very much of my world, but it was also opening up the doors to all those textures and that scale of what could be done.



Debut album *Familial* (2010).

So did you always see these songs as grand pieces?

That's what I was aiming for in terms of the soundscape. But, weighed against that, I wanted the songs to be very up close as well, in terms of vocal delivery and lyrical content. I wanted to keep them conversational. The wild card for me was [drummer] Valentina Magaletti. I hadn't expected that at all.

It was initially supposed to be you on drums, right?

Yeah, but I sacked myself after a day-and-a-bit, when I realised that I wasn't getting to where I wanted to be, drumming-wise. I sat down with [producer] Marta Salogni and talked about what I wanted to achieve and the kind of textures I was hearing. She went away for the weekend and came back saying, "I've been speaking to Valentina. I think she would really work. You're welcome!"

Were you listening to anything that informed your songwriting?

Absolutely. One key artist for me, who ended up playing on the record as well, was Hannah Peel. She has that songwriting side, of course, but I've also been watching what she's brought to her soundtrack work over the past four or five years. There was an album that she did, *Chalk Hill Blue* [2020], with the poet and writer, Will Burns. And that really kind of informed me. Hannah was putting together these visceral soundscapes against very starkly honest words. And that I found really inspiring. Coming into it, I was imagining *Strange Dance* as a record that Carole King and [electronic composer] Daphne Oram might have made, a fantasy collaboration back in the day.

Given the various collaborators here, how open were you to songs changing as you went along?

I knew the songs would all work

Selway swaps to guitar for a solo set at End Of The Road Festival 2010 in Dorset.

ANDY SHEPPARD/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

> For all of us in the band, we've taken that relationship to places that we couldn't have imagined when we started. And within that, I think we've all shaped our musical voices and output.

PRESS/PHIL SHARP

in and of themselves, but I went into the sessions with the attitude that they're just a jumping-off point. And you have all these incredible musical voices put into the project. So it's kind of creating a structure for all those different voices to really sing out and then seeing what happens. *Salt Air*, for example, was written very much with a kind of pastoral, Nick Drake feel in its original form. But Valentina did this incredible drum track to it in the studio, then Quinta and Adrian Utley came in the following week and tried it with a drone underneath. And these two worlds came out that I really liked, just leaning into that drone world and very expansive, angular strings. Suddenly, the whole song just took on this new soundscape. It was a sunny song in its original form, then became a kind of moody coastal song.

Was that also the case with the title track, which sounds very percussive and Tom Waits-ish?
Yeah. It was originally very much a piano ballad with strings. It sounded like something that could've been from Paul Buchanan's solo album, *Mid Air* [2012], very small scale and quite effective. But then you have all these musical voices. Again, Valentina put down this amazing rhythm track, then everybody just responded to that. Hearing the strings in the context of this new drum pattern, there was this real tension between the two and it just brought out something more sinister. Hannah Peel did some lovely synth parts and a very otherworldly vocal, which then informed the brass arrangements. So the song just kept on growing and growing. And that happened over and over on this record. It made for very exciting sessions for me.

From what you're saying, a lot of this seems to have been an exercise in trust as much as anything else...
Yeah, I think that's a lovely way of putting it. All round it was a very supportive and open atmosphere in the studio.

PRESS/ALEX LAKE

Radiohead circa 2016's *Moon Shaped Pool*.

Everybody fed into that. It felt a truly collaborative process and that's where I do my best work, I think.

Considering its inevitable effect on so many recent albums, how mindful were you of *not* making this a pandemic record?
I think everybody had their personal psychodramas during the pandemic. A lot of people were put back into a very introspective spot as well. And I think that's what, emotionally, I found very interesting about the whole project. You don't need to write about a pandemic to draw on those elements. There's a song called *Check For Signs Of Life*, which is very much about going through those periods of big change and that sense of displacement that you can feel: the loneliness, the loss. But they're very universal themes as well. I found that a very interesting kind of creatively fertile place to explore.

At the same time, do you think that backdrop gives the album an added sense of reflection?
I think the backdrop suited my personality [laughter]. I'm probably Mr Lockdown anyway!

So was it important to finish on an uplifting note with *There'll Be Better Days*?
Absolutely. I finished *Weatherhouse* on a song called *Turning It Inside Out*, which ends with the line: '*It's kissing all my dreams away.*' On reflection, I liked the sentiment, but I wanted to leave with a more uplifting one on *Strange Dance*. And that feels like the emotional journey of the record anyway. It's not trying to shy away from any difficult topics, but I wanted some sense of resolution, some sense of optimism in the lyrics. We've all had enough of the other side for the past few years, really.

In the wider context of your musical life, Radiohead has often been a collaborative effort, but was a solo career always in the back of your head?

> When the pandemic happened, we'd always planned to take a year off from Radiohead around that, so we could get on with other stuff. But that just meant that those other projects kind of grew, so we're allowing time for all of those projects to go where they need to.

For me, drumming's always been about how it fits into that broader scope of songwriting. So yes, I've always wanted to develop my songwriting. When Radiohead got signed and things started to develop for us as a band, I realised I needed to just completely focus on the drumming and what that could bring to our material.

For all of us in the band, we've taken that relationship to places that we couldn't have imagined when we started. And within that, I think we've all shaped our musical voices and output. For all of us, it's the realisation that that's only part of the story. It's been important that Jonny's [Greenwood] done his soundtrack work, and that Thom [Yorke]'s done his work on Atoms For Peace and joining Jonny for Smile and Ed [O'Brien] doing his solo stuff. And Colin [Greenwood]'s just been out playing with Nick Cave and Warren Ellis, which is incredible. Isn't that just the ultimate gig?

2014's Weatherhouse.

You've previously said that 2010's *Familial* was you making up for lost time. Did you wish you'd started making solo albums a little earlier?
In some ways, but then again I don't think I'd have been able to do it in the way that I did. As a voice in my own right, it wasn't completely developed until then. You need to launch into that to actually find out where you want to go, musically. So it felt like a very natural jump-off point for me at that stage. I don't have any regrets for it not having happened before. When I started out doing the solo material, I realised it was quite a steep learning curve for me to go on. And I guess the scope of it has grown with the musical experiences I've had in there, making the records, doing the soundtracks, people that I've worked with.

***Familial*'s successor, *Weatherhouse*, felt more ambitious and adventurous...**
I'd shown that I could do it with *Familial*, that I could be a singer-songwriter in my own right. There was proof. And it felt like a natural progression to go on and make a record like *Weatherhouse*. Looking back at where *Familial* came from, it was a very hushed kind of songwriting process and I was very unsure about my singing voice at the time. So it was a case of trying to find the singing voice, then building the arrangements up around it. It's a very intimate record because of that.

Does the singer-songwriter part of you alter your approach to drumming?
I think it comes back to how drumming fits in as part of a song, as part of that writing process, because I think that's very much where I've always come from. When Radiohead were making *The Bends* [1995], John Leckie [producer] told me that I played drums like I was playing guitar. And I thought, "Oh, that's interesting." But I knew what he meant. It's part of that rhythmic texture, if you like. What I do is very embedded in the song.

Making up for lost time with his solo albums, and we couldn't be happier!

PRESS/PHIL SHARP

How else has your solo work impacted on your style?
Just having the opportunity to work with all these different drummers, really. On *Familial* I was working with Glenn Kotche from Wilco. Watching him up close was incredible and inspiring. Then when I was touring *Familial* there was Alex Thomas. He brings this whole other, very developed voice. He's done so much with [IDM artist] Squarepusher, so I found that space where you can blend that kind of electronic and straight-ahead music world.

Then working with another drummer, Chris Vatalaro, who's just so versatile. Put anything in front of him and he can play it. He sounds amazing on any instrument. And, of course, playing with Clive Deamer in Radiohead. He's always been one of my favourite drummers, so to actually drum alongside him was amazing. And then Valentina on this new one. So it's about all of it, just actually being up close to other people as they're working out drum parts and getting a real sense of their musical voice and how they continue to develop it.

When it comes to formative influences, was prog on your radar much when you were growing up?
Yeah. I've got two older sisters and if you go back to when I first started getting into music, which would have been at the end of the 70s, my initial musical adventures were overhearing records coming out of their rooms. They listened to everything from King Crimson and Pink Floyd through to The Clash. I favoured more that kind of post-punk thing, the new wave thing. That's where I really connected with music, initially.

Having said that, even at that age, everything was very tribal. So anything prog I probably rejected. But that very formative stage with King Crimson, Pink Floyd and everything else was still in there. Also, with Radiohead, I guess we've kind of drawn on those elements as well at various points – that kind of musical ambition, the scope and the soundscapes. There's a huge amount to connect with, really.

On location in New York in 1993, circa *Pablo Honey*.

BOB BERG/GETTY IMAGES

As a drummer, how important was the discovery of bands like Can, Faust and Neu! in terms of rhythm? Did that have a palpable effect on your playing?
I guess from around *Kid A* onwards, yes. Those kinds of rhythms and textures were really feeding into what I was thinking about. A lot of those drum patterns that were around at that time go into this quite hypnotic space. And I think that whole motorik approach really suited that. Also, when you're in a band, you're very guided by how your other band members respond to what you're doing.

Talking of which, is there anything new to report on the Radiohead front?
We're always talking about stuff. But in terms of an actual kind of collective project, beyond the *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* stuff that we've been doing [2021's *Kid A Mnesia* reissue project and interactive exhibition], it's kind of further down the line for us when that will happen. We're talking about that, but at the moment everybody's doing their own thing. When the pandemic happened, we'd always planned to take a year off from Radiohead around that, so we could get on with other stuff. But that just meant that those other projects kind of grew, so we're allowing time for all of those projects to go where they need to. But yeah, we'll get together soon and in the next couple of years there will be something there, of some sort.

And is your next solo album already starting to take shape in your mind?
It is, actually. You get to the end of one project and can't see beyond that for a little while, but it's led by the ideas that you've got coming as well. To do a solo record you need songs and they are starting to happen a bit more now. So yeah, I would love to. When I first started doing the solo stuff, I was just thinking of it as a trilogy of records and didn't really project beyond that. I certainly didn't think I'd end up doing soundtrack work or any of the other stuff. And in some ways, I guess *Strange Dance* feels as though it's completing that initial cycle. And it feels wonderful to be at that point.

And what else does this year hold for you?
This year will mostly be about the live side of things. I've had some unexpected drum gigs come up, which have been brilliant – working with James Yorkston And The Second Hand Orchestra and there's another band that I've been working with. That's all reconnected me with my drumming brain as well, so I'd like to develop that a bit more over the coming year. It's a case of working in periods there and trying out new ideas, without the pressure to deliver there and then. It means they've got time to breathe and incubate a little. If anybody's interested in me doing a soundtrack, I'm available!

Strange Dance is out now via Bella Union. See www.philipselway.com for more information

GENESIS

Auntie knows best: the prog titans get a career-spanning, if incomplete, box set drawn from the Beeb's archives.

Words: Sid Smith **Illustration:** Mark Leary

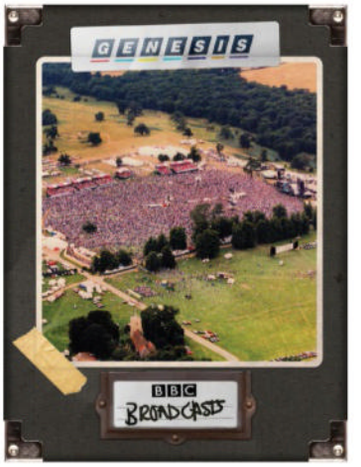
For any serious band in the late 60s and 70s, securing a BBC Radio 1 session and having your songs fly through the nighttime airwaves into the ears of punters and record label executives alike was a crucial part of what was then known as 'making it.'

BBC Broadcasts begins with sessions from 1970 to 1975, and continues via appearances at Knebworth in 1978 and 1992, 1980's Lyceum gig, Wembley in 1987, and the Birmingham NEC in 1998. Across these five CDs (or three vinyl LPs), it's possible to measure Genesis' steady advance from cultish oddity to unlikely national treasure by the audience's reaction as much as the music. During the previously unreleased performances of *The Fountain Of Salmacis* and *The Musical Box* at the BBC's Paris Theatre from March 1972, the supporters are small in number but vocal for their underdog favourites. As their days of trundling around the motorways of Albion are put behind them, from 1975 onwards the roar of the stadium-sized crowds get loud enough to drown out the engines of a large jet, which is by then their regular city-hopping mode of transport when touring the USA. Once cap in hand for any crumbs that might fall from the BBC's timetable, as the 1970s progressed into the 1980s and beyond, they were gifted radio and TV specials by Beeb producers as befits a band at the top of their commercial powers.

Early in their career, whether by design or accident, Genesis had a tendency to have the sharper edges apparent in concert somewhat softened on record. In the previously unreleased sessions for John Peel, *Get 'Em Out By Friday*, broadcast in November 1972, a month after *Foxtrot*'s release, Rutherford's spiky and querulous bass spars with Collins' vigorous drumming, and gives the polished studio version more than a good run for its money. The effect of the adrenaline-infused rush from playing live is especially evident on the third disc containing what is now the most complete version of their 1980 Lyceum gig.

BBC Broadcasts

UMC



> **The effect of the adrenaline rush from playing live is evident.**

Afterglow has a lively spring in the step, pulsing with a vitality that's all but absent on the maudlin plod of its studio counterpart.

Throughout the post-Gabriel shows, Daryl Stuermer and Chester Thompson dig deep into the material to bring a lithe muscularity. Stuermer's showcase solo on *Firth Of Fifth* during *Old Medley* simultaneously honours Steve Hackett's sublime melodicism while adding a sprightly potency that slides beyond reverential reenactment. The same is true of that venerable warhorse *The Knife*, here deftly sharpened to a deadly 3'52" running time, indicating that brevity needn't always mean compromising a song's artistic integrity.

With Gabriel's tenure represented by 11 tracks and Ray Wilson's by just two, it's Collins who rightly dominates this box. His growth from earnest muso to all-around entertainer is admirably illustrated. Whether it's the crack of his thunderous double drumming during those excursions with Thompson, the crowd-pleasing extrovert tambourine-tossing antics, or gently traversing the emotional nuances of *Say It's Alright Joe*, there's never a moment when the crowd isn't completely in the palm of his hand.

Of course, there is a "but" with the 53-track *BBC Broadcasts*. Some of it's been previously released on *Genesis Archive 1967-75* and though cherry-picking *some* of the previously unreleased tracks from Radio 1 sessions in 1972 is obviously welcome, the knowledge that other numbers have been left to languish in the Beeb's vaults is immensely frustrating. Similar concerns apply to later performances known to exist.

If history is written by the winners, when it comes to curating a band's narrative, the 'winner' will usually be the one member with the fortitude and forbearance required when revisiting the work of their younger selves. It's common for musicians, when delving into their archive, to blanch or become queasy at the prospect of what they judge to be a subpar performance or questionable audio quality being immortalised through an official release. In this instance, it's ultimately the decision of producer Nick Davis and Tony Banks as to what goes in and what gets left out.

However, hardcore fans, who will surely account for the vast bulk of potential sales, generally want the gig, the whole gig, and nothing but the gig, warts and all. The compilers might, not unreasonably, point out that this approach would result in a degree of repetition that defies common sense. It's a rational enough argument of course but one that hardcore fans, who'd jump at the chance to compare and contrast those respective sessions, are unlikely to be comforted by. Had what was in the BBC's archives been released in full this could have been *The Complete BBC Broadcasts*, and that would have made this absolutely indispensable rather than optional.

PHOTO SOURCE:MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

GENESIS
genesis
GENESIS
GENESIS
Genesis
ON THE AIR
ON THE AIR

EXPLORING BIRDSONG

Dancing In The Face Of Danger LONG BRANCH

Prog Award nominees finally deliver a second set of goods.

It's probably fair to say that of all the great Liverpudlian trios who've covered *(Don't Fear) The Reaper* and also written a song with Sir Paul McCartney, Exploring Birdsong are among those most likely to succeed. *Prog* first spotted them back in 2018, playing as if to thousands in a near-empty room above a pub in Camden, a year prior to the release of debut EP *The Thing With Feathers*. Located sonically somewhere between the classically inspired sparkle of Iamthemorning and Steven Wilson at his most bombastic, they made a noise much bigger than the sum of their parts, aided in no small part by bassist/keyboardist Jonny Knight and his ability to play both instruments at the same time.

> **It's taken a long time, but it's an enticing, many-layered listen.**

It may have taken a long time to get here, but follow-up EP *Dancing In The Face Of Danger* is an enticing, many-layered listen. Kicking off with a brief thunder of drums from Matt Harrison before launching into a stuttering riff, *Pyre* leaps about with cheery abandon, one idea swiftly consumed by the next, juddering sections followed by deft piano passages, vocals spiralling skywards and a rumbling bass line at the death that's straight from Chris Squire school of fleet-fingered dexterity. *The Way Down* begins with a keyboard intro that could almost be a Rammstein cast-off, before a monumental guitar riff arrives, except it doesn't because of course there's no guitarist involved, though it never seems that this might be some sort of oversight. Exploring Birdsong paint with a lot of very bright colours despite their apparently limited palette.

Floating above, behind and beyond all this brushwork is singer and pianist Lynsey Ward, who shines most brightly on *Bear The Weight*, coming on like Kate Bush fronting Porcupine Tree as the other musicians crash and collide around her. *Ever The Optimist* — the song they wrote with McCartney, back when they were students at the Liverpool Institute Of Performing Arts, the college co-founded by the ex-Beatle — follows, and it takes another tack altogether, gently unwinding over wobbling synths before more guitars that aren't actually guitars usher everything towards a giddy, frothing climax.

Last up is the EP's longest song, *No Longer We Lie*, which packs an awful lot into less than the time it takes to boil an egg. It kicks off with a piano line that sounds like a more upbeat version of that bit from *Tubular Bells* that was used in *The Exorcist*, before spidering off into further territories, with string sections and crazy rhythms and possible choruses of angels. There's a lot to like here.

FRASER LEWRY

AISLES

Beyond Drama PRESAGIO

Chilean sextet deliver album four with flair after six-year wait.

Following up their 2016 sprawling concept album, *Hawaii* – hailed by *Prog* as a "joyous expression of individuality" – was never going to be an easy feat. It seems Aisles have taken their time in crafting its successor.

With vocalist Israel Gil, who joined in 2020, at the helm, the band feel re-energised. It's a shame, then, that the magic of this line-up is to be so short lived with Gil, guitarist Rodrigo Epúlveda and drummer Felipe Candia announcing their departure from the band in late January. The high energy of *Fast* unites modern prog rock with swinging salsa, while *Megalomania* balances beautifully pained vocals with sugary hooks. *Needsun* is thickly layered and tactfully cacophonous, while the extravagant, slow burning 11-minuter *The Plague* is a contrast. It subtly nods to the founding fathers of prog without watering down Aisles' uniqueness before instrumental *Game Over* closes with new meaning. The record flaunts the group's dexterity as songwriters wonderfully and has a wide, colourful appeal, yet is now a snapshot of what could have been. The remaining members can celebrate its success, albeit with the question of 'what next?' hanging overhead. **POW**

DAVID BREWIS

The Soft Struggles DAYLIGHT SAVING RECORDS

Field Music founder revels in baroque majesty on delightful solo album.

Best known for leading Sunderland art-rockers Field Music with brother Peter, David Brewis has also carved out an intriguing career with side-project School Of Language across three albums. With such a prodigious output behind him, it comes as something of a surprise that *The Soft Struggles* is his first fully fledged solo album.

What also raises eyebrows is the current direction taken by Brewis. While his side-project has found him moving in the area of mutant funk with music that twists this way and that, it's here that he's found his sweet spot. Eschewing hard rhythms, he's accompanied by Sarah Hayes (piano and flute) and Faye MacCalman (saxophone and clarinet) as well as the string quartet of Ed Cross, Jo Montgomery, Chrissie Slater and Ele Lecki and the result is an album of very English baroque pop.

While *Surface Noise* recalls the celtic folk-soul of Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks*, the rest of the album nods to the tranquillity of Zombies' vocalist Colin Blunstone's 1971 solo offering, *One Year*, which serves to highlight Brewis' tremulous voice and lyrical empathy (see *Start Over*). Best of all is *The Last Day*, which swells to a glorious climax. More please. **JMC**

THE AARON CLIFT EXPERIMENT

The Age Of Misinformation THEAARONCLIFTEXPERIMENT.BANDCAMP.COM

Texan quartet search for the truth on album number four.

The challenges of the last few years have offered oodles of creative opportunity for songwriters out there, and the latest to have a crack are The Aaron Clift Experiment with their fourth album, *The Age Of Misinformation*. A document of the lockdown era, the US prog collective paradoxically continue to give their music the freedom to roam.

'Born into a swarm of eyes, where hoaxes grow like thorns,' vocalist and keyboardist Clift sings on the title track, on top of classic rock-meets-prog vigour. There's a Rush whip to *L.I.A.R*, while the ethereal *Color Of Flight* skews the norm and slides in sun-kissed acoustic guitar, strings and percussion, even if the pace occasionally drops and the album teeters on the edge of losing its verve – *Rise* drags, despite some incandescent harmonies.

The crowning glory is served up in *Bet On Zero*, a 10-minute odyssey featuring Big Wy's Brass Band, which somehow manages to sneak in a drum solo mid-tune without feeling trite. Joyfully detouring into hook-glazed, jazz fusion, it's an exhilarating romp that shows why this Experiment should, well, experiment like this a little more often. **CC**

MATT DORSEY

Let Go MATTDORSEY1.BANDCAMP.COM

Pop-rock tunes from ex-Sound Of Contact multi-instrumentalist.

Having established himself in various other projects – namely, Sound Of Contact – it's no shock that Matt Dorsey's first solo LP, *Let Go*, is a diverse affair. Featuring contributions from Marco Minnemann and Dave Kerzner, standout *Waiting For The Fall* comes closest to evoking the sci-fi prog rock hooks and complexity Dorsey is most associated with. Contemplative opener *Castles Made Of Sand* recalls late-70s Genesis, whereas *Man* and *Let Go* lean closer to the cosmic keyboards and guitar-driven heft of Rush.

All of them do a superb job of fusing familiar genre elements with Dorsey's distinctive singer-songwriter palette, yet the album is truly impressive when it veers into even fresher territories. The ballad *Compromise* is particularly catchy and uplifting, with gentle acoustic guitar and piano chords supporting vocal harmonies and modest percussion. Influences such as XTC and Peter Gabriel can be felt within *Impossible Friends*' sophisticated arrangements, while *Echo* borders on orchestral indie rock thanks to its bouncy rhythms and jubilant horns. Closer *Dangerous* is a bit bland, but it doesn't stop *Let Go* from being an enjoyable listen. **JMB**

ELECTROND

Uneasy Listening ELECTROND RECORDS

Space madness from Norwegian progger's spin-off project.

Electrond is the brainchild of Trond Gjellum, the drummer in Oslo prog bands Panzerpappa and Suburban Savages. For this electronic side-project, Gjellum taps into the universes of far-out composers, such as German avant-garde titans Conrad Schnitzler and the late Manuel Göttsching, bringing his own eccentricities to the party.

Onstage he assumes PPE clothing and covers his head and body like a post-apocalyptic lab technician. It's in keeping with the extended EP's title, although *Uneasy Listening* is a misnomer. Opener *Apogee* is stately, like a numinous ballroom of the imagination, while *Cicada* chimes with retro-futurist nostalgia. There's a charming, almost ramshackle DIY element to all of these songs, bringing a tatterdemalion elegance that feels rather like a rocket ship lost in space, majestic yet ravaged by one meteor storm too many.

Occasionally there's an undercurrent of György Ligeti-inspired space static that allows the listener to feel displaced in the dark cosmos, as on the atmospheric soundscape, *Impossible Kalandra*. But mostly it's an alluring and distinctly non-uneasy listen. **JA**

THE ENIGMA DIVISION

The Enigma Division THEENIGMADIVISION.BANDCAMP.COM

Irish prog metal prospects on the rise.

Well, this is a belter. Self-professed 'tech noir' group The Enigma Division features ex-Xerath guitarist/keyboard player Conor McGouran and drummer-vocalist Ben Wanders, joined in their new venture by bassist Ronan Burns.

The guitars here are crunchy, and the rhythm section possesses heft and power, yet despite the heaviness, the overall vibe is energising and upbeat. It's refreshing to hear music this punchy with clean, passionate vocals and a mood that's hopeful rather than wallowing in gloom or menace. They can reach towards djent riffage in *The Age Of Discovery* and McGouran knows how to shred, yet they'll balance that out with the rich piano lines and gentle washes of synth in the excellent ballad *Clarity*.

Derek Sherinian makes a guest appearance on the standout *Echoes To The Deep*, matching the trio's unrestrained energy with his vigorous solos. They conclude on impressive form with *1977 – Ad Infinitum*, a bracing blend of sweeping soundscapes, double-kick grooves, guitar dramatics and a reminder of humanity's fragility and temporality in a vast universe. A bright prospect to watch for in 2023. **DW**

LAZULI

11 L'ABEILLE RÔDE

Fewer quirks and flights of fancy in reflections from French proggers.

It doesn't seem that long ago that Lazuli were the intriguing new French kids on the prog block, bringing their lush and often magical brand of songwriting to a wider audience beyond the borders of their homeland. Now they're on their 11th album – hence the title.

> **An enduring optimism shines through the gloom.**

This is the product of dashed hopes and optimism tempered by experience – like many around the world, Lazuli founder member and main songwriter Dominique Leonetti sought positives from the pandemic. He was encouraged by the way that lower levels of human activity allowed nature to seemingly rejuvenate and by the opportunities afforded by lockdowns prompting us perhaps to change how we live and interact with each other and the planet. However, coming out the other side, he became disillusioned with humanity simply reverting to 'business as usual'. The resulting album speaks perhaps more of sadness, shadow and doubt than Lazuli's previous output, but with an enduring optimism shining through the gloom. Yin and yang, shadows and light.

Musically, *11* is a recapitulation of what the band do best – enchanting and beautifully crafted vocal melodies that spark earworms for days, like the strangely understated opener *Sillonner Des Océans De Vinyles*, *Triste Carnaval* and *Lagune Grise*, married to often sumptuous arrangements that draw on symphonic prog, European folk and warm ambience.

Musical points of reference here would have to include the hints of Supertramp building to a cracking, heroic guitar solo flying high and far in *Le Pleureur Sous La Pluie* and the jaunty folk-rock meets anthemic power-pop of *Égoïne*. There are also strains of *Trick.../Wind And Wuthering*-era Genesis about the album as a whole – not that it sounds like them, but there's that juxtaposition of melancholy whimsey and stirring themes, and in how it "feels" – listen especially to *Triste Carnaval* and closer *Le Grand Vide*.

The dualities pervading the album are perfectly framed in the pairing of the tracks *Les Mots Désuets* and *La Bétaillère*, with the former an aching, plaintive lament for our inability to articulate what we often need to say set against a single picked acoustic guitar, and the latter a heavy, dark, highly effective commentary on humanity's wholesale slaughter of animals, accompanied by the rumble of timpani and a relentless rhythm section lope.

While *11* is a fine ensemble album with everyone, including new recruit Arnaud Beyney on guitar, contributing potent yet sensitive parts, it does feel very much like a highly personal, even cathartic, statement from Dominique Leonetti. An album that simply had to be made? It sounds like it.

GARY MACKENZIE

NE OBLIVISCARIS

Exul SEASON OF MIST

Aussie prog metallers' mix the sublime and the extreme.

It would be easy for those of a more sensitive disposition to be put off by Australian six-piece Ne Obliviscaris' reputation as an extreme progressive metal band. Yet while gargled vocals and blast beats are two ornaments with which they decorate their music, the bigger picture shows plenty of pleasing progressive pedigree to reward perseverance.

> **It showcases them at the height of their powers.**

On this, their fourth studio album, the Melbourne band transcend genres and styles like a ghost floating through the walls of a haunted manor. There's fluency and theatre in their contradictory, metal-meets-classical feng shui, as attested by the 12-minute *Equus*. Sweeping string motifs, spinning metal riffs and acrobatic fretless bass entangle to create a sophisticated décor. Even when at their most clangorous, the frame feels more colourful for it and that balance helps blunt the — for some — off-putting edge of their aggression.

Arguably too, while there's a Broadway-esque shimmer to Tim Charles' superlative clean vocals, when underpinned by co-vocalist Marc 'Xenoyr' Campbell's harsh, hellhound bark, there's a magic in the contrast of textures and tonality that just works. *Graal* adds to that trend while upping the ante at both ends of the vocal spectrum as violins and guitars snap at one another throughout. The elongated drama of *Misericorde II — Anatomy Of Quiescence*, meanwhile, feels well-placed in the track listing as it offers a dynamic lull that flirts with a glossy, post-metal aesthetic. It builds like a blockbuster thriller, with stuttering strings, shuffling drums and spacious minimalism. When its finale detonates following a virtuosic 90-second guitar solo, its grimace of gruff vocals and fury feels like a fitting conclusion to the piece. That ending is a world away from the closer, *Anhedonia*, which unfurls like a dirge for an unknown hero. Its violins weep alongside mournful, plodding piano, growing more and more unsettling until it fades into fizzing radio static, seeing out the record with a stunning avant-garde landscape.

Tracking for the album actually began in March 2020 — a date with understandably ominous undertones, and it foreshadowed the upheaval that was to befall the band over the following years, from writer's block to drummer Daniel Presland leaving last year. Recording sessions became fragmented and testing, with eight studios across three countries ultimately used as the band grappled with a follow-up suitable to sit at the same stately table as its predecessor, 2017's *Urn*. Yet, listening to *Exul*, there's no hint of that backstory. Instead, they exude confidence and cohesiveness across a broad-palate record that showcases this bold band at the height of their powers.

PHIL WELLER

HOLLY HENDERSON

The Walls IVY RECORDS

Kent vocalist reveals subtle depths.

This Maidstone-born singer-songwriter's second album exudes the essence of progressive folk and feels very rural; a contrast to her rockier, LA-recorded debut. It's chiefly introspective, gazing out of the window, quietly musing over solitude and hope, home and escape, yet it has an attractive tendency to glide into intriguing areas, whether that be via hooky melodies or spells of analogue synth tinkering. The atmospheres here shift charmingly between Nick Drake, Beth Orton and a playful, optimistic ambience of Henderson's own. *Back After Sunrise* brings us in with a 70s-tinged lilt, its relaxed Colin Blunstone swing humming warmly before the crisper *Druxy* offers a more brittle air of craving, with guitar breaks suggesting a cheekier Steve Howe. This unflashy confidence sustains through the bittersweet *Head Full Of Soil*, where her voice glitters with life, and the melancholy title track, redolent of a less nihilistic Nico. Six-minute centrepiece *Weep Like A Willow* takes its time, accumulating drama with exquisite patience, while *The Planes* is the (relatively) perky psych-pop single. An alluring album; one wants to hear what she does next. **CR**

STEVE HILLAGE

LA Forum 31.1.77 MADFISH

Exciting live document of "etheric celestial sounds".

At the start of 1977, and in the wake of his latest album, *L*, going Top 10 in the UK, Steve Hillage travelled to California for the first time as, somewhat incongruously, ELO's support act, playing to audiences of thousands, most of whom had never heard of him. Yet as this recording from the second of two shows at the LA Forum in Inglewood clearly shows, Hillage and his band were in uncompromising form on this tour, with the crowd treated to an energised rendition of most of *L*, mystical interludes and all. This is the front-of-house desk mix as recorded on cassette, so the quality is that of a superior bootleg, but the vibrancy and tightness of the playing is often quite astonishing. In particular, Hillage's tone is flawless throughout, shifting seamlessly from melodic noodling to hard riffing to metallic soloing with some aplomb. He does a pretty convincing job of communing with the etheric plane on *Hurdy Gurdy Glissando* and *Lunar Musick Suite* despite being in a hall of 15,000 people waiting to hear *Evil Woman*, before gliding down to Earth with a joyous version of George Harrison's *It's All Too Much*. Cosmic bliss rock par excellence. **JB**

ISOBAR

III ISOBARPROG.BANDCAMP.COM

Californian instro-proggers deliver classic sound with a modern twist.

Isobar are the San Jose-based trio of bassist Jim Anderson, guitarist Malcolm Smith and keyboardist Marc Spooner, augmented here by a plethora of guest players. Hitting the sweet spot between King Crimson, Camel and Rush, they specialise in multitextured instrumental prog that's compositionally complex but pleasingly cogent, the various transitions handled with confidence rather than glued together in hope.

The flowing piano and Mellotron intro of opening track *Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been?* hits a mid-paced glide guitar groove before plunging headlong into a section of chromatic angularity. *Parts Of Harvey* has a looser, more laid-back vibe, before a shift into stuttering riffage. *Face In The Blue* is another piano-led mid-pacer, which then dashes off in a cosmic rock direction fuelled by fusion keys and muscular bass. *The Trouble With Buttons* is faster from the start, its introduction of sax and trumpet moving the band in a jazz rock direction that will delight Hatfield And The North fans.

An impressively played and arranged album, driven by an old-school prog sensibility without ever indulging in outright ancestor worship. **JB**

FLOOR JANSEN

Paragon ADA

The voice of Nightwish reveals her glossy pop-rock side.

After a traumatic 2022, during which she was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent successful surgery, Floor Jansen has earned this revitalising rebirth.

Despite being omnipresent in the symphonic metal realm since the turn of the century, *Paragon* is the Nightwish singer's first solo album. She's steered away from writing anything that resembles either her day job or any of the multiple projects she's lent her versatile tones to over the years. Instead, *Paragon* is an exercise in sumptuous but intimate pop-rock songs, with Jansen's voice given rather more room to breathe than it generally gets during Nightwish's intricate, progressive metal epics.

With nods to artsy, big-budget 80s pop, there's plenty for prog fans to enjoy here. *Paragon* strikes a balance between bombast and intimacy: delicate ballads *Hope* and *Storm*, the euphoric electro-blues of *Me Without You* and joyous alt-pop anthem *Invincible* are all genuinely moving. Elsewhere, opener *My Paragon* sounds like a futurist Pat Benatar and grand finale *Fire* is one big, triumphant crescendo. A simple pleasure, but Jansen's voice elevates every last second. **DL**

MIKE KENEALLY

The Thing That Knowledge Can't Eat EXOWAX

Nick D'Virgilio and Steve Vai guest on ex-Zappa man's off-the-wall latest.

This guest-heavy follow-up to 2016's *Scambot 2* offers more proof of the vast musical abilities and left-field imagination of ex-Zappa guitarist, keyboardist and vocalist Mike Keneally.

A tight nine-song set, *The Thing That Knowledge Can't Eat* opens with quirky piano-led skit *Logos*, heads into 70s-style alt-rock with the strident *Both Sides Of The Street* and then turns on a sixpence for oddball acoustic piece *Mercury In Second Grade*. Keneally's voice is soft and breathy on the ironically titled *Big Hit Song* and gentle *Spigot (Draw The Pirate)*, featuring drums from BBT's Nick D'Virgilio. Crunchy instrumental *Celery* is packed with guitar licks that are typically oblique yet still make perfect musical sense, with fellow Zappa alumnus Steve Vai adding some juicy showboating of his own.

Featuring members of the Metropole Orkest and bass Aristocrat Bryan Beller, brassy prog-jazz moment *Ack* evokes late-era Zappa, *Lana*'s one for Devin Townsend fans, and ex-Gentle Giant drummer Malcolm Mortimore powers the harmony-soaked closer *Carousel Of Progress*, a joyous amalgamation of all the niche goodness that came before. **GRM**

LAUGHING STOCK

Songs For The Future APOLLON

Norwegian trio's fourth album in four years.

Jan Mikael Sørensen and Havard Enge have never hidden their passion for the music of their 80s youth, and there's a distinctly retro look to the graphics of this new album's sleeve, but *Songs For The Future* is a far more eclectic-sounding affair than those cultural signifiers might suggest.

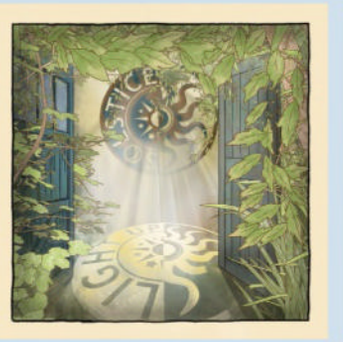
Whereas their last two thematically linked albums, *Zero Acts 1 & 2* and *Zero Acts 3 & 4*, were concept sets, here they offer up a grab bag of styles and subject matter. Not all of which, in truth, will appeal to everyone. *'The boys are going out for a night on the town,'* they sing over a rinky-dink acoustic rhythm on opener *For The Boys*, and a string of clichéd observations follow. Thankfully, that's atypical. Far better is the title track, which channels the yearning ennui of mid-period Floyd, and *Like Home*, which paints a captivating epic sonic vista. Elsewhere, the harmony-drenched trip of *Blue Grass* tells us to *'lay down and dream of custard and cream'* – a tempting proposition that leaves us in a far different place to where this album started.

As mystery tours go, though, this has enough magical moments to keep casual travellers on board. **JS**

SOLSTICE

Light Up GEP

Neo-proggers' late-career revival continues apace.



When the neo-prog scene of the 1980s is mentioned, this Hertfordshire band sometimes slip away, forgotten among the mentions of Marillion, Pallas, Pendragon, IQ et al. But their work from back then is just as worthy of rediscovery, and in recent years they've enjoyed a creative rebirth that continues with this sixth album.

> **It blends knotty prog tropes with broad, melodic strokes.**

Back in the 80s, Solstice's connections with the free festival scene saw them positioned towards the hippie end of the neo-prog spectrum, while others attempted to create a more soft-rock-friendly style, but this, their second record with vocalist Jess Holland, does a good job of blending fusion and knotty prog tropes with broad, immediate melodic strokes.

The stammering rhythm of *Light Up*, for instance, doesn't prevent Holland's entrancing, multitrack-harmonised vocal from its seductive path, and while some rock-schooled acts sound a touch wooden when trying to get groovy, an irresistibly slippery funk bass line introduces *Wongle No9*. (Note to all bands: do update your songs' working titles, won't you?) The feel is further enhanced by some skilfully clipped guitar either side of Holland's demand: *'don't stop, hold your head up'*. The first five minutes would make for a supremely infectious track that would have been edited down for the benefit of radio back in the 80s, but Solstice have earned the right do things their own way, which may be why the track is then extended by founding guitarist Andy Glass' freewheeling solo.

This ability to weave irresistible melodic hooks into songs while framing them within unorthodox beats and decorating them with adventurous instrumentation is further demonstrated on *Mount Ephraim*, whose itchy fiddle riff threatens to take long-term residence in your head even as what sounds like a jaw harp wriggles around underneath it, before it blooms into more expansive, harmony-clad choruses and more fret-mangling. And far from sounding indulgent, it seems like the logical, slightly unhinged conclusion to a joyous jam session.

The second half of the album turns the lights down lower with *Run*'s floaty midnight lament and *Home*'s yearning contemplation, before eastern instrumentation laces the 10-minute album-closer, *Bulbul Tarang*, as it builds from a beatific meditation into a hands-to-heaven folk-rock anthem. That's just the beginning, though as it then descends into softer, almost new agey pastures then reignites through more gutsy Glass soloing and climbs back up to a celebratory, almost gospel-like conclusion. A roundabout way to *Light Up*, for sure, but getting there is every bit as enjoyable as arriving.

JOHNNY SHARP

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BILL LAURANCE & MICHAEL LEAGUE

Where You Wish You Were ACTMUSIC

Progressive, ethno-jazz tinged bromance from underdogs turned top dogs.

Michael League is best known as the founding member of Texan progressive jazz outfit Snarky Puppy, and London-born pianist Bill Laurance has been in that band since before their first album while also developing a fascinating solo career on the side in recent years. Their first collaboration as a duo is a record full of surprises, and anyone expecting Snarky Puppy unplugged may be in for a shock.

It's certainly stripped back, with Laurance concentrating everything on a "prepared" grand piano with some of the brightness deliberately dampened, though his playing still has plenty of sass on tracks like *La Marinada*. It's League who confounds expectations here: the funky bassist in Snarky has switched to traditional stringed instruments like the oud, lute and ngoni, which transform *Meeting Of The Mind* and *Ngoni Baby*.

The pair consolidated their musical partnership with a road trip across Italy during the pandemic when it would have been impossible to bring the whole band. As such, it sounds like a cinematic testament to friendship by two remarkable technicians rather than merely a mission to plunder the sounds picked up along the open road. **JA**

OIAPOK

Oisolün ORIGNAL MUSIC RECORDS

Debut from this exotic, Canterbury-loving French collective is *magnifique*.

Oiapok's composer Pierre Wawrzyniak was once part of oddball psych-rockers Camembert, but here he's united with vocalist Mélanie Gerber and a collective of musicians playing trombones, harp, xylophones and vibraphones. Together, they imbue clever tunes with proggy Canterbury sounds, modern jazz elements and breezy chanson stylings.

While Gerber's vocals draw on retro, *chansonnière* textures on the title track, the moody *Summer 19* also shows her Björk-y, avant-pop side, and she's just one part of a larger tapestry here. The parpy trombones and tight, bright xylophone/vibes parts inevitably evoke Zappa (the busy, dazzling *Les Grands Equipages*), but Matthieu Lenormand's snappy drum work and Wawrzyniak's exuberantly clever bass grooves give Oisolün less a passé feel and a more contemporary, jazzy one. There's something of Regal Worm's modern psych in here too.

Gerber's tones, the exotic instrumentation, the beautifully nuanced, melodic writing and tight musicianship all gel on this delightful first offering. Oiapok are happy to inhabit their small intersection, and deserve to be heard. **GRM**

PERIPHERY

Periphery V: Djent Is Not A Genre 3DOT

Progressive metal pioneers continue to broaden their horizons.

Anyone who pushes the play button on Periphery *V* would be forgiven for thinking they've been tricked into putting on a route one heavy metal record. Opening song *Wildfire* explodes with a drum fill, followed by chugging riffs and pinch harmonics, then frontman Spencer Sotelo's barrage of growls only make it feel even more brash.

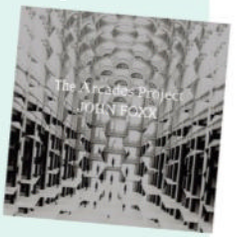
However, as the seventh album by Washington DC's djent pioneers (a term they clearly dislike, given the snarky album title) proceeds, it reveals a host of experimental proclivities. Not only do *Wildfire*'s riffs eventually give way to a lounge jazz interlude. *Silhouette* ventures even further into uncharted territory by evoking a prog Linkin Park, its blitzkrieg guitar playing traded for soothing keys and electronics, with Sotelo giving it his best croon. The closing one-two of *Dracul Gras* and *Thanks Nobuo* – totalling 24 minutes between them – showcase the album at its most experimental, darting through tech metal, prog rock, post-rock and even some juicy pop hooks.

Route one heavy metal? Only to those who refuse to give this band's songwriting the scrutiny that they so rightly deserve. **MM**

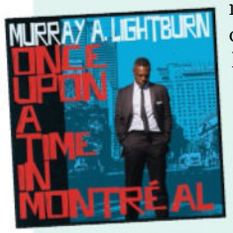
ART-ROCK

Chris Roberts samples the new releases on the prog/rock boundary.

Elusiveness and mystery, always present in the solo work of **John Foxx**, are the slow-burning fuel of *The Arcades Project* (Metamatic), his first ever album of piano instrumentals. He worked with Harold Budd on 2003's *Translucence/Drift Music*, but that was wilfully abstract. This feels more centred, without sacrificing any evocative dreamlike qualities. A contrast to his last (Ultravox!-referencing) album *Howl*, which came as close as Foxx now ever will to 'rock', this quietly muses over fin de siècle Paris. The musician is a flâneur, finding correspondence in unexpected sights and offering responsive sounds. Its minimalism is moving; its restraint rich in reverie. Foxx's 21st-century body of work grows ever more absorbing.



The Dears are the Montreal art-rock specialists who never caught the big wave that lifted Arcade Fire to global recognition, but frontman **Murray A Lightburn**, on third solo album *Once Upon A Time In Montreal* (Dangerbird), might have pulled off a reframing. It's the opposite of the band's busy idea parties. It relaxes unapologetically into crooner territory, partly in tribute to Lightburn's recently deceased father, a jazz musician. Produced by Howard Bilerman (Leonard Cohen, The Weather Station), it swings between high-camping the genre like Father John Misty and simply honouring it, echoing the warm-bath soul of Dionne Warwick or Billy Paul. A touching, tender U-turn and eulogy.



Also from Montreal, Juno-award winning trio **Braids** return with fifth album *Euphoric Recall* (Secret City). They describe this as a "playful, looser" release, but it's divisively clever-clever. The rhythms attract, but the vocal lines leap and flail with erratic impulsiveness: the recent "difficult" Björk albums sound like Kylie Minogue next to this. For good or ill, it's hard to ignore.

Much more accessible, but equally smart, is the eighth album from Toronto's rightly lauded **US Girls**, *Bless This Mess* (4AD). Meg Remy's keenly evolving project may now have embraced modern disco too unironically for some readers, but there's a kind of Trojan Horse strategy going on as her lyrics become increasingly idiosyncratic. Written as she conceived and birthed twin boys, it includes love songs to a breast pump and a tuxedo.

That's certainly not the case with **Harald Grosskopf**, whose *Oceanheart + Ocean Revisited* (Bureau B) combines his 1986 krautrock/electronica classic with new remixes, which add topical heft and colour without spoiling the original proto-trance appeal.

And there's a vibrant timelessness about the latest from **A Certain Ratio**. *1982* (Mute) may be confusingly titled, but it's a thrilling set of red-hot masterful avant-funk from the enduring Mancunians, which, were it by New Order, would be universally rhapsodised from rooftops.

ZIO

Truewaves ZIOBAND.COM

Drummer Jimmy Pallagrosi leads his band back to the future.

With the second album from Zio, drummer and bandleader Jimmy Pallagrosi takes the listener on a whistle-stop tour of progressive rock in the 1980s, from neo-prog to prog-pop and Pink Floyd. He's supported in this endeavour by a cast of seven vocalists, including Eric Gillette from NMB, It Bites/Frost* frontman John Mitchell, and Hayley Griffiths. *Truewaves* captures the era when synthesisers took over from Moogs and Mellotrons, combined with a sense of drama that draws on musical theatre and Jim Steinman's operatic rock.

> **A whistle-stop tour of 80s prog, from neo-prog to prog-pop.**

The album opens with a little spoken prelude to set up the concept, although quite what constitutes a 'Truewave' is distinctly hazy. The first song, *Untenable*, has the most assertively contemporary sound on the album, bookended by heavier sections that reach towards prog metal. Guitarist Marc Fascia's riffing in the outro has a touch of Metallica to it as he locks in with Pallagrosi's drums, but the keys of Olivier Castan keep everything rooted in the prog world.

The neo-prog vibe asserts itself in *Space Heater*, which throws some 80s AOR into the mix, with the accessibility of the chorus melody, big runs around the tom-toms from the drummer, and Eric Gillette's vocal style that could fit on a late-80s AOR track. The instrumental *Lonely Diamond Pt 1* feels like a tribute to Gilmour-era Floyd, providing a showcase for Fascia's tasteful, bluesy guitar work. Hayley Griffiths' angelic tone brings out the musical theatre stylings of *Amused*, while *Living Behind* is perhaps the oddest moment on the album. The track features lead vocals by duo Magda & Miranda and the music could be described as prog-pop, yet despite the pleasant piano melody and strings, there's something slightly unsettling about just how closely the two voices harmonise. It's perilously close to sounding like the twins from *The Shining*, which was probably not the intention.

Above The Wheels sounds like Jim Steinman meets It Bites, not just because of John Mitchell's vocals, but there's that same meeting of hard rock guitars, pop hooks and sweeping drama in Mitchell's delivery. The album's grandest composition, *I Hear Them Whistling*, starts with *Scarborough Fair*-style folk led by In Continuum's Gabriel Agudo, before the prog returns with a big instrumental flex in the mid-section.

This is an ambitious piece of work from Pallagrosi and his collaborators. While his formative influences are readily apparent, the consistent quality of the songwriting and performances helps *Truewaves* work as a cohesive whole, even if the precise nature of the album's underlying concept remains rather elusive.

DAVID WEST

POLINSKI

Telex From MIDI City DATA AIRLINES

Occasionally brilliant third LP from 65daysofstatic mastermind.

Since 2011's *Labyrinths*, 65daysofstatic's Paul Wolinski has released two albums, an EP and several singles under his Polinski moniker. Where his main band have increasingly focused on generative and algorithmic music, *Telex From MIDI City* is instead more premeditated both thematically and musically.

Its core idea comes from academic and polemicist David Graeber – the notion that the world we see has been imagined into being, and that we could imagine it differently. Re-contextualising timbres and tech from the past is key here. The slickest tracks – *Distant Friend*, *I Love You!* and *Other Worlds Parts 1 & 2* – heavily feature jittery 90s breakbeats and 80s synths. However, in context, these parts melodically and tonally belong to the modern electronic canon.

Despite other tracks such as *95haunts* and *Youth Loop* also relying on the same ethos, the highlight of the album is elsewhere, and the angular, wrong-footing build of *Night Ocean* departs from the mission statement. As its crescendo synths tear through the climax, it sounds starkly modern, synths repurposed as a stand-in for a wall of distorted guitars. **AL**

THE PROG COLLECTIVE

Seeking Peace CLEOPATRA

Yes bassist's prog supergroup serves up a new batch of original gems.

Whether they're dishing out original songs or reinventing rock staples from decades past, Billy Sherwood's Prog Collective usually deliver great LPs. The same holds true for *Seeking Peace*, the project's first assemblage of new material since 2013's *Epilogue*. The interlocking vocals, breezy rhythms and colourful instrumentation of opener *Electric World* channel the synth-laden sleekness of 80s prog. It also sets up the playful vibe that Sherwood and company uphold during the remaining pieces, with *In An Instant* and the uplifting *Finally Over* serving as authentic throwbacks to the spirit and craftsmanship of the genre's initial decade.

Elsewhere, *Seeking Peace* and *A Matter Of Time* scale back the theatrics to provide riveting verses, whereas *All Is Meant To Be* is a concise yet epic conclusion. Only the penultimate *Take The Path* sticks out as relatively unengaging and derivative (specifically, it seems built upon *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* by Sherwood's regular employers Yes). That's a small setback in an otherwise terrific collection, though, so *Seeking Peace* is still a very worthy addition to the group's catalogue. **JMB**

PSYCHEDELICAT

Like A Delicate Psychedelicat PSYCHEDELICATSPONGECAKE.BANDCAMP.COM

Cheltenham pair spike their folk flavours with a touch of acid.

Marvin B Naylor and Rebsie Fairholm have made some seriously haunting folk music together in recent years, with a penchant for unusual instrumentation ranging from psalteries to electric guitars played with bows. They're also fans of 60s psychedelia, as the name of this project suggests, and their debut set under that moniker is as an intoxicating a confection.

The trippiness of *Captain Digorie Piper His Galliard* is enhanced by the use of medieval reed instrument the cornamuse, and the sweet acoustic reverie *Venus Blue* is decorated with a harp-like instrument that lends the whole affair the feel of a deleted dream scene from *The Wicker Man*. Their folk roots show through on the traditional lullaby of *Corpus Christi*, in which Fairholm's voice takes on a giddy, hypnotised quality. *Steer By The Stars* benefits from multipart harmony vocals redolent of a 70s Brit-folk collective, but the eerie *Bright Hucclecote*, Fairholm adopts a wafer-thin warble, like Vashti Bunyan singing in the shower, as Naylor weaves spidery patterns of bewitching noise in the distance.

They may have been as sober as tax inspectors making this, but these are vibes to generously feed any head. **JS**

RAIN

Radio Silence GEP

Second long-player from British band fine-tunes the frequencies.

Intended or not, Rain's 2020 debut, *Singularity*, contained pronounced gear shifts across its five tracks – due in part to the fact that it was produced remotely, with band members not meeting at any point. *Radio Silence* is a different beast in many respects.

Yes, it boasts an unchanged line-up of drummer Andy Edwards and bassist John Jowitt (both ex-IQ and Frost*) alongside Rob Groucutt (keyboards/lead vocals) and Mirron Webb (guitars/lead vocals) and it draws on both old-school prog and diverse contemporary styles. It is, however, a more song-orientated, more focused and arguably less self-conscious album than their debut. While there are twisty-turny time signatures (*Hypnosis* and *Solid State*), and the playing is first rate, it's the way that styles merge and the vocals speak that gives this album an edge. Moments in *Never Ending Circle* could be Jamiroquai-goes-prog and the Beatles-evoking verse vocals in *Bring It Back* are simply delicious. Mini epic *Solid State* has vocal refrains that burrow into the brain and the occasionally ska-leaning *Something New* boasts entrancing verse/chorus confections. *Radio Silence* proves that 'modern prog' needn't be a contradiction in terms. **GMM**

RPWL

Crime Scene GENTLE ART OF MUSIC/SOULFOOD

Floyd-channelling Germans are back with a criminally good record.

In the years since their 2000 debut *God Has Failed*, these German proggers have shown that they know their way around a concept album. For their eighth studio record, RPWL are turning to crime.

Crime Scene draws on notorious real-life characters such as cannibal Karl Denke and necrophile Carl Tanzler. But such macabre themes slide by nicely thanks to Yogi Lang's likeable, unforced vocal style, and, as a listening experience, it's the sound of four blokes making a genteel, 80s-tinged, post-Floyd racket.

Opener and lead single *Victim Of Desire* is a dramatic, symphonic piece armed with Kalle Wallner's grandstanding guitar work and Lang's sweeping keys (the expensive-looking video is well worth YouTubing too). The affecting *Red Rose* and disturbing *Life In A Cage* work well, with the 13-minute *King Of The World* the most ambitious of *Crime Scene*'s six tracks.

Tonally *Crime Scene* follows on from 2019's *Tales From Outer Space*, with shades of Alan Parsons, Flower Kings, early Marillion and Lonely Robot along with the countless Floydisms here. It's another very assured traditional, anthemic prog rock album. **GRM**

SERMON

Of Golden Verse PROSTHETIC RECORDS

Enigmatic prog metal project takes a big step forward.

The brooding atmospherics of Sermon's debut album, *The Birth Of The Marvellous*, made it one 2019's most intriguing releases. Fronted by an anonymous, golden-masked outsider known solely as Him, a smattering of live performances followed, but the band never gained the momentum their music warranted.

This time, things may be different. If their debut offering was all about tension and release, *Of Golden Verse* feels more immediate, threatening and pissed off at the world. Their musical mantra is the same, with the haunted nursery rhyme motifs of *Senessence* and the villainous séance of *Royal* continuing where its predecessor left off, but with greater conviction.

Him's vocals are a different class now too, spitting and soaring atop structures that feel like they are always moving forwards with dark intentions. He forms a presence that shadows over the songs with menace, be that on the dark pop funeral march of *Golden*, the bombast of *Wake The Silent* or the anthemic, extreme metal-tinged brilliance of *Departure*. The angrier brother to an impressive debut, *Of Golden Verse* feels bigger, bolder and far more accomplished. **POW**

PROGRESSIVE METAL

Dom Lawson buckles up for a delve into the darker, heavier side.

Emerging from the pagan metal underground, eyes ablaze with madness, **The Wolves Of Avalon** are on gleefully bonkers form on *Y Gododdin* (Godreah). Rooted in grimy extremity but feverishly progressive and quite, quite mad, these five wayward tracks evoke visions of this septic isle's bloody, battle-bound past, but with rather more lysergic surrealism than you get in most history books. In particular, *The Shining Company* is a fantastic song.

Equally fascinating but far less accessible, **Liturgy**'s *93696* (Thrill Jockey) requires commitment: 83 minutes long and always bewildering, it veers from crazed math rock and sumptuous shoegaze to noirish chamber music and free-form noise. Vocalist Ravenna Hunt-Hendrix may prove to be a stumbling block for many – fittingly, she often sounds like a raven being electrocuted – but *93696* is a challenge worth accepting.

For those looking for deeper musical waters to explore, **Nomadic Narwhal** have delivered the aquatic goods. The four-part *Fathoms* (nomadicnarwhal.bandcamp.com) is an instrumental prog metal odyssey dedicated to the unknowable might of the oceans. Almost certainly a Devin Townsend fan, the project's unnamed mastermind shares the Canadian's wide-eyed sense of space and love of a good riff. Best heard in one hit, *Fathoms* sounds like the start of something special.

Equally obsessed with the sea are Germany's **Ahab**. Their fifth album, *The Coral Tombs* (Napalm), is a sprawling concept piece, based on Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea*, marauding giant squid included. Ahab's elegant, progressive doom ebbs and flows at a glacial pace, brilliantly imitating the colossal swell of giant, rolling waves. Frontman Daniel Droste's unearthly warble and subsonic growl may be an acquired taste, but songs like the 12-minute *Ægri Somnia* are sonically vast and overwhelming.

Skilled acolytes of prog metal's traditional wing, Spain's **After Lapse** have made a debut album to savour. *Face The Storm* (Frontiers) combines the virtuoso dexterity of Dream Theater with the emotional ferocity of Evergrey, chucking in some skull-rattling power metal vibes as an added treat. From instrumental overture *Thrive* to the tearful pomp of *Along The Way*, every song hits the spot, and frontman Rubén Miranda has chops and charm in large quantities. Could be huge.

Indonesia's **Kekal** garnered some well-deserved acclaim for last year's *Envisaged* album, and so the release of a career-spanning compilation for curious newcomers makes perfect sense. *Eternitarian: The Essential Kekal 1995-2022* (kekal.bandcamp.com) is a 31-track magic carpet ride through some of the wildest, off-the-radar heaviness ever recorded. It's now available as a name-your-price download, so there is no excuse for not taking the plunge. Do wear a helmet, though.

THE ZOMBIES

Different Game COOKING VINYL

Blunstone and Argent prove they're still far from the walking dead.

Of all the 60s bands who've had a second life decades after their original incarnation, The Zombies' later run has been one of the most fruitful. Singer Colin Blunstone and keyboardist Rod Argent have almost two decades of touring but also creditable new music behind them since reuniting, periodically joined by all surviving original members when playing their 1968 psych rock classic, *Odessey And Oracle*. This trajectory has been aided and abetted by Blunstone's almost supernaturally well-preserved voice and Argent's ongoing knack with beguiling arrangements and tunes so distinctive it's as if they've always been around.

> **The ambition will appeal to those who like audaciousness.**

Proceedings on their fourth album since 2004 – and seventh in total – are often embellished with superbly realised string adornments, such as the tasteful coda to the gospel-flavoured opening title track. A quartet arrangement takes over from the processional, churchy feel, with Argent's Hammond roaring away, and whisks us off to a destination that's an altogether lighter and more whimsical. This ability to change the direction of music and atmosphere on a hairpin ties them to the proto-prog era of their classic 1968 album, yet also continues in the vein of 2015's well-received *Still Got That Hunger*. As with that platter, the sense of adventure here is married to a sinewy, multilayered, hard-edged 70s jazz rock feel that often recalls Steely Dan, with a dab here and there of primetime 10cc.

On lead single *Dropped Reeling & Stupid*, the principal members spar vocally over a funky backing that recalls the Dan's *Aja* dipped in Stevie Wonder's *Songs In The Key Of Life*. The late-night, jazz-inflected *Run Away* turns similar tricks, with Blunstone's smoky voice meshing with Argent's electric piano. One can but imagine the media hoopla if Donald Fagen came out with new material this good.

Elsewhere, *Rediscover* piles on the late-60s vibes, calling to mind the vulnerable balladeering side of sometime Zombies touring partner Brian Wilson as he expanded his horizons beyond the surf. Best of all is *I Want To Fly*, setting a breathy Blunstone vocal against a beautifully baroque string arrangement. Nothing here cracks the five-minute limit, but the ambition, detail and cohesiveness is what will appeal to those who like audaciousness in their listening.

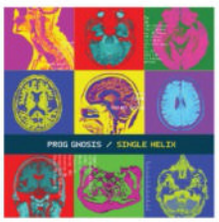
Blunstone and Argent both hit 78 in June and they're clearly aware of the ticking of the clock. *'So little time, so much left to do,'* sings Blunstone on the closing *The Sun Will Rise Again*. There's also a knowing nod to Argent classic *Hold Your Head Up* in this song's intro, something they manage to do in spades throughout *Different Game*.

PAUL GING

SINGLE HELIX

Prog Nosis ROUGH DRAFT AUDIO

Retro-leaning hug of an album from ex-Kentish Spires keyboardist.



A Parkinson's diagnosis in 2021 led to multi-instrumentalist Rik Loveridge leaving his band, The Kentish Spires, to make his debut solo album. Taking cues from early-70s prog in general and the Canterbury scene in particular, *Prog Nosis* evokes sounds and feels of yesteryear.

Kentish Spires fans will recognise reworked versions of that band's songs in the mostly languid, piano- and sax-drenched 19-minute suite of *Trilogy*. Guest guitarist Nick Fletcher contributes some beautiful work to many tracks here, including the spacious instrumentals *West Coast Journeyman* and *Dark Matter*. Elsewhere, there's an environmental focus to the understated balladry of *Silent Spring* and *Nature's Eyes* and the soothing ambiance of *Teed's Lullaby* eases us towards the album's close.

There are echoes of The Tangent, not least in Loveridge's gentle yet melodic vocals, yet Single Helix lack that band's diversity, complexity or edginess. Despite that, *Prog Nosis* sounds very lovely indeed with warm, comforting keyboard, guitar and woodwind textures, and an easy, laid-back jazz sensibility never too far away. **GMM**

SKÁLD

Huldufólk DECCA/UNIVERSAL

French Norse-ophiles' fourth album of ancient-meets-modern incantations.

They may look and sound quintessentially Nordic, but Skáld are in fact the brainchild of French multi-instrumentalist Christophe Voisin-Boisvinet, who has taken his passion for early music and Norse mythology and run with it, armed with a collection of the requisite medieval instrumentation.

However, on *Huldufólk* there's little doubt that more contemporary sounds have crept into Skáld's campfire cauldron – black metal for one, in the guttural, Satan-expectorating vocal style adopted for several of these tracks, and industrial hardcore in the quasi-militaristic donner-und-blitzen beats that permeate many of these compositions.

While there's little in the lyrics that will be discernible to non-linguist Brits, the chanting vocal hooks employed on *Ljósálfur* and *Elverhøy* are as hypnotic as any pop banger, and *Då Månen Sken* builds to a stirringly mantra touching on the same territory as Kate Bush's *The Ninth Wave* song cycle.

If anything it's an unwelcome return to Anglophone source material when Skáld finish the album with a cover of The Cure's *A Forest*. Right habitat, wrong language – when we understood less, we absorbed all the more. **JS**

STEPHAN THELEN

Fractal Guitar 3 MOONJUNE

Experimental guitars combine to mesmeric effect.

Since 2019, Swiss guitarist and composer Stephan Thelen has convened what amounts to a regular summit of creative guitarists working across the progressive, ambient, electronica, and jazz scenes. This latest *Fractal Guitar* release is arguably the best to date.

Here, the collective fretboards of Eivind Aarset, Markus Reuter, Jon Durant and other guitar guests collide with drummers Yogev Gabay and Manuel Pasquinelli's pulsing rock grooves. Yet this is no tedious jam session – there's not a solitary clichéd lick in earshot.

All instruments are deployed with Thelen's distinctive orchestral precision. Some drift hazily like clouds, others bring timbral and rhythmic structure, but all combine to frame fierce and inspired soloing. Heady cascading runs, hypnotic drones, tangled rhythmic counterpoints, and vaporous keyboards dance in and out of focus to dizzying effect.

Thelen's thoughtful, occasionally introspective writing also comes with his unerring ability to arrange explosive dynamics guaranteed to make the sparks fly to endlessly expansive and dramatic spaces. **SS**

TOADSTONE

Cernunnos TOADSTONEMUSIC.BANDCAMP.COM

Arboreal folk masks pagan unease on Gloucestershire trio's second album.

Horror, spoken or unspoken, is one of the foundation stones of folk music, something Toadstone are fully aware of. The Gloucestershire trio's second album may have a veneer of pastoral gentility, but dark waters churn just below its surface.

Cernunnos – named for an ancient Celtic deity – sits somewhere between Jethro Tull's *Songs From The Wood* and Ben Wheatley's *A Field In England* in its skewed approach to tradition. The innate eeriness of *Feast*, *Knot Garden* and *Leonora*, the latter based on an old Germanic ballad about a sinister knight, is emphasised by their pared-down delivery. Lucy Newbould's hauntingly clear vocals are supported by music that's sparse and occasionally strange, courtesy of guitarist Mike Libbiter and especially flautist Bhavandeep Stephenson, whose contributions adds an unsettling air to proceedings. There's an underlying menace to the sweet-sounding *The Weald*, while Herne The Hunter and The Wild Hunt make appearances in the three-part title track.

Cernunnos isn't quite trippy enough to qualify as acid-folk, but its weirdness – or wyrd-ness – is there for anyone who cares to dig for it. **DEV**

EMMA TRICCA

Aspirin Sun BELLA UNION

Melodic folk prog experimentalism that'll soothe life's aches and pains.

London-based singer-songwriter Emma Tricca was handpicked by Nick Mason as opener on Saucerful Of Secrets' 2018 tour. Tricca's work might not seem Floydy per se, but her delicate, acoustic guitar storytelling often has Syd Barrett somewhere in the expression, mixed with her passions for Italian proggers Le Orme and estimable jazz-folkers Pentangle.

Fourth album *Aspirin Sun* (what a Syd title!) keeps that feel, Tricca's vocals on a Karen Dalton/Vashti Bunyan axis in a melody-driven set, texturised by ambient Americana and watercolour minimalism. Backed by former Sonic Youth drummer Steve Shelley, The Dream Syndicate's Jason Victor on guitar and bassist Pete Galub, Tricca's close-mic'd vocals have a calming ASMR effect, and there's a touch of Spiritualized in opening track *Devotion*. Emotional themes are present, such as the loss of Tricca's father, whose memory emerges on the dreamy, Young Rascals-riffing *Christadora House*.

The third act is the most stimulating, featuring 11-minute psychedelic standout *Ruben's House*, the acid-folk of *Through The Poet's Eyes* and a cosmic hymn – with superb jazz trumpet – *Space And Time*. **JK**

UNKNOWN MORTAL ORCHESTRA

V JAGJAGUWAR

Ruban Nielson's New Zealand-formed prog-psych act shifts up a gear.

"The definitive UMO record," says Unknown Mortal Orchestra conductor-in-chief Ruban Nielson of his fifth album. Long operating as a kind of lo-fi Steely Dan with a nice sideline in off-kilter guitar hooks, Nielson made *V* between Palm Springs and Hawaii. Tapping the Hapa-haole (i.e. 'half-white') music that's part of his part-Polynesian DNA, he's made a sunny, un-typically tropical LP of prog jazz instrumentals, skewed yacht rock and playful, envelope-pushing pop.

Nielson's brother Kody shares drumming duties, while their father Chris Nielson plays fine sax and flute on a defiantly upbeat record concerned with not-always-happy childhood memories and the mortality of loved ones. Claims that *V* is the kind of mid-period breakthrough that *1999* was for Prince might sound highfalutin, but they're really not. Together with the poppy, sunbaked-cassette sounds of Toto-gone-thrift-store gem *Weekend Run*, instrumental shake-ups such as the electric piano-led *The Widow* and the scuffed AOR ace *Guilty Pleasures* evince Nielson's unique, ever-evolving sound, and like The Purple One, he's great with textures. The definitive UMO record? It is for now. **JMN**

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Grant Moon has a rummage down the back of the *Prog* sofa for the ones that nearly got away...

Brassy London collective **Perhaps Contraption** last appeared in *Prog* with their 2016 album *Mud Belief*, and their latest release, *Nearly Human* (perhapscontraption.co.uk), is an even more delightful collision of performance art, choral music, Canterbury/Knifeworld-esque prog and Penguin Café experimentalism. Performed with vigour, thought and conviction, this beautifully rendered meditation on the life cycle of an atom accompanies the Contraption's gig/theatre show of the same name, which they performed at the Edinburgh Fringe. The record genuinely does spark thoughts about just what we are, and what we're made of.

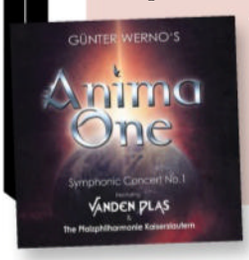
Based in Alnwick, Northumberland, **Unit8** bring a gentle, melodic and nicely DIY slant to prog on their current self-titled, self-released record. Lead singer Kris Popat's blessed with a hearty pure vocal tone, which, along with Rothery-esque chorused guitars, fiddly time signatures and some catchy tunes, makes for an enjoyable hour. *Unit8* (unit8music.bandcamp.com) is listenable, life-affirming stuff, and proof positive that the prog flame still burns at grassroots level.

When not at his day job as a music biz PR, Pete 'Pedro' Flatt is the drummer in his own arty unit. **Speedvark** has been going, on and off, since the 80s and now features the original members' children among the ranks. Now freshly reissued, their 1991 debut album, *Pigeon Pop* (Chestnut Records), remains a catchy, clever and fun baker's dozen of tunes drawing on everything from XTC to Talking Heads to early Stones.

Many, many geographical and stylistic miles away from Speedvark, Italian fuzzcore trio **Demikhov** proffer the gruelling *The Chemical Bath* (Dio Drone). This taser to the forehead was mastered by James Plotkin (Sunn O))), Isis), and includes the pulverising *The Leader Is Dead And Everyone Is Grieving* and, at a decidedly un-prog 16 seconds, *A Short Journey To The Soviet Brain Institute*. It's heavy, proudly niche, for-the-love-of-it stuff.

Also niche but more musically sophisticated, French duo **WuW** bring some massive, metallic sounds of their own on *Orchaostre* (Pelagic), which draws on the textures of post-rock and metal, and is composed with classical music-level intelligence, and a dash of kraut. This is a widescreen film for the ears, packed with atmosphere and drama.

And finally this time, another, more traditional symphonic work comes from **Günter Werno**, keyboardist for German proggers Vanden Plas. The band join the Pfalzphilharmonie Kaiserslautern on *Anima One* (Frontiers), a rock-orchestral piece that the talented Werno was commissioned to write by a venue after the band performed Jon Lord's own *Concerto For Group And Orchestra* there. While this live recording can feel a little distant, *Anima One* is a grand and refined work, one for fans of Lord, Wakeman and Oldfield alike.



HAWKWIND

Days Of The Underground: The Studio & Live Recordings 1977-1979 ESOTERIC

The spirit of the age, captured in full.

It was as if Hawkwind had been willing punk to happen since the end of the 60s. Although they were as out-of-step with the Sex Pistols as they had been with the original prog set, their distinctive space rock was easily tweaked to create some of the most vital music of their entire career. Once Robert Calvert was reinstated as the group's vocalist in 1976, his cerebral freak flag and anti-establishment stance dominated three marvellous albums of speed-driven edge.

> **It contains some career-best Hawkwind performances.**

Days Of The Underground: The Studio & Live Recordings 1977-1979 captures this period in full across its 10 discs (including two Blu-rays). The original studio albums — 1977's *Quark, Strangeness And Charm*, 1978's *25 Years On* and *1979's P.X.R.5* — are presented in new Steven Wilson and 5.1 surround sound mixes, complemented by out-takes, 1977's Rockfield sessions, and concerts at Ipswich, Croydon, Leicester, Barnstaple and Uxbridge.

With its hard-rocking title track, and *Spirit Of The Age*, *Quark...* is familiar yet different enough from what had gone before. The 1977 *Sonic Assassins* concert, here in its fullest form, highlights the relationship between Brock and Calvert. In an improvised introduction to *Master Of The Universe*, Brock provides sympathetic backing to Calvert's stream of consciousness, touching on the recent breakdown that had led to a temporary secession from Hawkwind.

By early 1978, Brock and Calvert had retooled Hawkwind as Hawklords: *25 Years On* captured their fusion of new wave and space rock, while the accompanying November '78 concert at Brunel University, where the group are at full tilt, is a revelation. Reverting to the Hawkwind name, *P.X.R.5* contains the bona fide classic *Uncle Sam's On Mars*, and *High Rise,* which drank from the same cup as punk in its subject matter — the alienation of tower block living — yet Calvert's elegance rendered its bleak social commentary poetic.

The Blu-rays complete the package with a few songs from Brunel and an appearance on Marc Bolan's 1977 TV show. Calvert in his flying cap and drummer Simon King with his cupid's bow lippy miming to *Quark, Strangeness And Charm* must have terrified the tea-time audience.

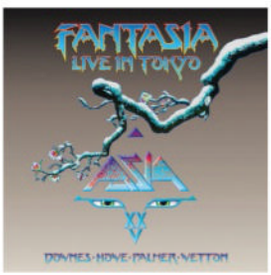
Being Hawkwind, it couldn't last. There were enough shifts in Brock and Calvert's supporting cast in these three years alone, and by the end of 1979, another chapter of the group was beginning. *Days Of The Underground* contains some career-best Hawkwind performances, a fine testament to the years the group were engulfed by the spirit of the age, yet had the skill and intelligence to avoid cliché.

DARYL EASLEA

ASIA

Fantasia Live In Tokyo 2007 BMG

First-time vinyl issue for impeccably presented live effort.



Fantasia was recorded on the 2007 tour that followed the reunion of the original Asia line-up for the first time in nearly a quarter of a century. It revolves around the two albums released in that brief but spectacularly successful 1982-83 period, with every cut from Asia's debut given an outing.

The impressive chops of all four members are on display on a suitably epic *Wildest Dreams. Don't Cry* reveals hidden depths denuded of drums and with Steve Howe switching to mandolin. Other highlights include a brooding *Without You* and a joyous *One Step Closer*, with Howe stepping forward to share vocals.

The dips into the foursome's back catalogue could have been more adventurous, though. The Emerson, Lake & Palmer and Buggles choices are ticked off nicely via an excellent romp through *Fanfare For The Common Man*, with John Wetton's growling bass substituting for the boinga-boinga synth rhythm, recalling the feel of Floyd's *One Of These Days. Video Killed The Radio Star* benefits from Howe, clearly enjoying himself, unleashing a celebratory cascade of pin-sharp notes wherever he can.

There's a muscular rendition of the Yes live warhorse *Roundabout*, but given the presence of both Howe and Geoff Downes, this was perhaps a missed opportunity to tackle something from fan-favourite curio *Drama*. Wetton, meanwhile, nods to his King Crimson years with an affecting *In The Court Of The Crimson King*, even though he hadn't joined the band at that point. An inclusion from Crimson's *Red* might have made more sense and given another opportunity to unleash some of the super-heavy prog dynamics that thunderously open this tremendous set in the intro of *Time Again*.

But these are mere quibbles. The quality of the playing and the recording will give the original studio cuts a run for the money, and it finally commemorates the live side of a superb reunion era, which also provided a happy ending for the original Asia. **PGI**

HUGH HOPPER

Jazzloops/The Stolen Hour CHERRY RED

Rare solo experiments from jazz-prog guru.

A key figure of the Canterbury scene, the late bassist (and more besides) Hopper was a centrifugal force in the early albums of Soft Machine and made valuable contributions to landmark works by Syd Barrett, Robert Wyatt and Kevin Ayers. Two neglected solo albums from 2003/2004 are excavated and remastered as a complementary pair here: they bounce off each other nicely, conversing until eventually the listener picks up on little nods and winks between them. This is free-form, often-improvised music - more jazz than fusion - which makes the listener work to stay on board, but if the challenge is accepted the rewards can invigorate.

Jazzloops doesn't do anything so obvious as to suit its title. It's aiming for a tensile texture and, cut from tapes and jams and then dressed with Hopper's bass, guitar and samples, it follows the tracks of Coltrane when it's in its finest flurries (when it isn't gelling, it tips into Henry Cow). Elton Dean's saxes are given a long leash while Gong's Didier Malherbe and revered jazz drummer John Marshall make concessions to a reluctant kind of linear propulsion. Robert Wyatt's in the room too, although one has to squint to appreciate his vocal cameo.

The same cosmic crew brewed the following year's *The Stolen Hour*, which is more fleshy and intense; a stronger sauce than its precursor. This was a multimedia collaboration with graphic artist Matt Howard, and the original comic strip, which it theoretically soundtracks is included here, telling us with pony-tailed hippie pride that governments don't own sunsets and the internet is, like, crazy. Acid jazz fans might enjoy it, even if they elect to overlook track titles like *Craig's Distended Train Ride* and *Snide Wisdom Involving The Immateriality Of Time*. The latter is as driven and forceful a blast as any on these albums, pumping and whirling with manic sprawling energy as the players seem to lock into what can only be described as an anti-groove. Sporadically wonderful. **CR**

ILLUSION

Everywhere You Go EDSEL

Post-Renaissance outfit's intermittently released output collected with extras.

The early history of folk-proggers Renaissance was turbulent to say the least, after ex-Yardbirds singer Keith Relf and drummer Jim McCarty formed the band with the former's sister Jane, bassist Louis Cennamo and keyboard player John Hawken, only for Relf and McCarty to quit within months followed by Cennamo, and in quick succession, Jane Relf and Hawken too.

Keith Relf reunited the quintet under a different name five years on, but died with the new band still in gestation. His sister and former bandmates persevered, though, and Illusion were born. They would never rival the success of the Annie Haslam-fronted Renaissance, but this reissue of the four albums they made shows that wasn't for lack of strong material.

On 1977's *Out Of The Mist, Beautiful Country* is a luscious folk-rock vision of a less-troubled England, while *Isadora* would fit on any Renaissance-related greatest hits set. *Illusion* (1978) leans further into Radio 2 territory and songs like *Wings Across The Sea* are positively show-tune-worthy, while *Madonna Blue* is a sweeping arena-baiting love song backed by cascading piano figures.

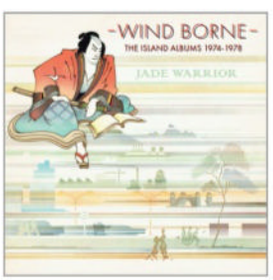
Catchy as the songs are on the then-unreleased *Enchanted Caress* (which eventually emerged on CD in 1989), their loved-up mood verged on MOR, although the elegiac ballad *The Man Who Loved The Trees* sees Jane Relf on captivating form. Meanwhile, *All The Falling Angels* is a sweetly wistful, lilting lament that her brother wrote and recorded before his untimely passing.

By the time the band reconvened to make 2001's *Through The Fire*, Jim McCarty was on lead vocals with Jane Relf only backing, and his voice doesn't match the standard of his writing and drumming – hence many fans regard it as a McCarty solo album. More tempting may be the lo-fi demos added to the first two LPs, with contrasting versions of the previously unreleased *Cherokee Moon* suggesting bluesy and western-tinted roads not taken, and *Sister Helena* showcasing an enticing ballad that surely deserved a higher profile. **JS**

JADE WARRIOR

Wind Borne: The Island Albums 1974-1978 CHERRY RED

Four-CD set that should elevate Jade Warrior into the prog pantheon.



Towards the end of *Clouds* on Jade Warrior's 1974 album *Floating World*, Jon Field plays a short quote on flute from Claude Debussy's symphonic poem *Prélude À L'Après Midi D'Un Faune*. It may be a piece of musical drollery, but then the 19th-century French composer and Jade Warrior have both been inspired by ideas from Eastern music and culture and incorporated them into a highly personal style. Yet rather than just purveying a kind of prog Chinoiserie, Jade Warrior produced a hybrid unlike any of their 70s peers.

Flautist/multi-instrumentalist Field and guitarist and multi-instrumentalist Tony Duhig recorded three albums for Vertigo, split in 1973, but reformed in 1974 and secured a deal with Island Records partly on the recommendation of Traffic's Steve Winwood. *Floating World* harked back at times to the stylistic eccentricity of their earlier albums with pre-ambient scene painting – Brian Eno rated the album highly – a whiff of exotica and Duhig's inspired post-psychedelic lead lines and heavy riffing on *Red Lotus*. Both musicians were remarkably talented but remain relatively unsung.

The generally more impressionistic *Waves* (1975), comprises two sidelong tracks, and there are sections of Duhig's idiosyncratic guitar grooves and Field's haunting double-tracked flute harmonies, with Winwood guesting on piano and Moog. From 1976, *Kites* is an equally sensual set with Clodagh Simmonds from Mellow Candle on multitracked "girls choir"; a number of guest violinists, including Fred Frith and a string quartet. The vividly recorded *Way Of The Sun* (1978) is inspired by Incan culture. *Sun Ra* starts dramatically with an energy surge of gongs, ritual drums and fuzz bass with rippling guitar arpeggios and spiralling flute lines, while later on, jazz and funk influences appear together with shimmering tuned percussion and brass. But although the duo's lack of commercial success saw them dropped by the record label that year it makes a strong claim to be Jade Warrior's most fully realised album. **MB**

PINK FLOYD

The Dark Side Of The Moon: 50th Anniversary Deluxe Box Set PINK FLOYD RECORDS

Prog landmark is given a lavish, if wallet-emptying reissue.

The howls of derision from the unenlightened that met the new logo celebrating the 50th anniversary of Pink Floyd's eighth studio album provided much hilarity for longtime fans. This – as if it needs reminding – is an album that's progressive on any number of levels. Dealing with mortality, greed, social stratification, conflict and their consequent mental health issues, *The Dark Side Of The Moon* still resonates half a century since its release – often horribly so. What should be a warning from a time gone by instead shows how little we've moved on from those days of energy crises, economic strife and televised war.

> **A physical artefact that's as enigmatic as the subject matter.**

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of this milestone release comes this breathtakingly handsome – and, at £250 for the top-of-the-range edition, eye-wateringly expensive – reissue. All credit to designers Pentagram for creating a physical artefact that's as enigmatic as the album's subject matter. Devoid of the prism that adorned the original album, the pitch-black and initially mysterious package is a gift that keeps on giving as it unravels its numerous wares across a number of layers. Putting everything back in and making sure it fits will test the patience of all but the most ardent *Tetris* player.

On top of vinyl and CD editions of the original album (the latter of which is the 2011 remaster) are another eight mixes spread across two Blu-ray audio discs and a DVD. These include the original album in a variety of 5.1 and hi-resolution remastered stereo mixes. Though adding extra sparkle to the sound – the gurgling and pulsing synths of *On The Run* immediately seize attention – the mastering seems a mite underpowered compared to the standard CD version. To these ears the stereo mix – DTS-HD MA and the 5.1 surround mix – Dolby Digital @640 kbps work best for enhancing the sound without causing a distraction, but audiophiles are in for endless debate.

Backing up these mixes are vinyl and CD versions of one of the band's November 1974 gigs at the Empire Pool, Wembley, although it cuts out the previews of the *Wish You Were Here* material and the encore of *Echoes*. Also included are two 7" singles of *Money* and *Us And Them* and sheet music for anyone wishing to play along. Best of all is an engrossing 160-page hardback photo book chronicling the band's 1973-74 tour.

For those daunted by the hefty price tag, the live album and hardback book are sold separately at a much-reduced price, thus extending the welcome to *The Dark Side Of The Moon*'s silver jubilee celebrations.

JULIAN MARSZAŁEK

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YES

Fragile ATLANTIC

Experience every detail of a prog milestone.

Yes' 1971 classic arrives in a clear vinyl edition to celebrate Atlantic Records' 75th anniversary. Aside from the transparent disc, everything about the package seems intended to imitate the original, with the gatefold sleeve and a replica of the booklet that accompanied the 1971 release. The booklet isn't desperately exciting, and contains a handful of band portraits, but its inclusion is a nice touch.

As for the sound of the record, the clarity is almost startling at times. It's possible to pick out every note that Bill Bruford plays in *South Side Of The Sky* and there's such richness to the tone of the grand piano in that tune. The one criticism is that this edition is notably bass heavy. Chris Squire was never shy on that front, but in *Roundabout* the growling bass threatens to overpower the guitar and organ and it's certainly a different listening experience from the 2003 and 2008 remasters.

Fragile marked the start of Yes' collaborations with cover artist Roger Dean, and saw Rick Wakeman join the fold. Each member contributes one featured piece of music, although Wakeman was still under contract to Rondor Music so couldn't legally write anything new. Accordingly, his spotlight piece is an arrangement from Brahms' *4th Symphony In E Minor*. Bruford's *Five Per Cent For Nothing* is mercifully short, and Anderson's *We Have Heaven* is an engaging musical mantra built from layered vocal lines. Howe's classically styled *Mood For A Day* has never sounded more intimate, and Squire's *The Fish (Schindleria Praematurus)* is compellingly cosmic.

There's no question that *Fragile* is a classic, so is this new edition worth anyone's time and money? The sound quality and mastering are excellent, articulating the complexity of the arrangements and playing, with heavyweight bass (and then some!) and plenty of bite in the high end. For anyone who's never experienced this landmark release on vinyl, it's the perfect excuse to rectify that. **DW**

FRANK ZAPPA

Zappa '80: Mudd Club/Munich ZAPPA RECORDS/UME

Twin Zappa archive gigs showcase the evolution of a rarely heard touring band.

The latest of a seemingly endless series of releases from Frank Zappa's estate, *Zappa 80: Mudd Club/ Munich* delivers two concert performances over three discs featuring a line-up that only existed as a touring unit for around five months and has been represented in a mere handful of tracks available previously.

Backed by Ike Willis and Ray White on vocals, Arthur Barrow on bass, Tommy Mars on keyboards and new recruit drummer David Logeman, the first disc here features Zappa's outing to the 240-capacity Mudd Club in New York City in May 1980. Providing contrast is the two-disc recording of the very last night of that tour some two months later at Munich's massive Olympiahalle arena.

The Mudd Club concert really brings the intimacy of its setting to life: the physical closeness and the sweat of the audience is almost palpable, and the chatter during quiet moments is audible. Recorded very basically on two-track tape, the sound isn't exactly rough bootleg quality, but the fidelity, band mix and separation do suffer somewhat. Featuring tracks mainly from *Joe's Garage* and the then-still-unrecorded *You Are What You Is* album, the tracks here are mostly played as we might expect them to be, with a couple of minor differences like *You Are What You Is* itself being noticeably slower than the studio album version.

The Munich show is a more expansive, slick and altogether more dynamic proposition. Recorded using very early digital technology, the quality is first rate. Everyone in the band performs with greater fluency and confidence, with Barrow and Logeman especially upping their game. With a similar set to the Mudd Club show but fleshed out with slightly longer guitar solos and the likes of *Dancing Fool*, *Bobby Brown Goes Down The Illinois Enema Bandit*, a cover of 50s doo-wop song *Nite Owl* and others, it's a reminder – should anyone really need it – of just how good pretty much any of Zappa's line-ups could be. **GMM**

PORCUPINE TREE

Deadwing: Deluxe Edition TRANSMISSION

Wilson and co's ghostly tales expanded.

With hindsight, it's interesting how little crossover *Deadwing* has with the music Steven Wilson recently selected on the "alternative 80s" compilation *Intrigue*, which is full of oblique, counter-intuitive ideas. In 2005, he preferred to rock in a linear manner. Porcupine Tree's eighth album was, nonetheless, key in establishing them as commercially viable.

> **Full-on fans will love every twitch and tweak.**

Around half was conceived as scoring a screenplay, a "Lynchian ghost story" constructed by Wilson and director Mike Bennion. When that stalled, the tracks formed the foundation of *Deadwing*. The result, featuring guest guitar from Adrian Belew and Opeth's Mikael Åkerfeldt, was more alt-metal than prog, and its post-grunge confidence built the ladder to the bold state-of-a-generation proselytising of 2007's *Fear Of A Blank Planet*.

Eighteen years on, with Porcupine Tree, having returned from a long hiatus, these earlier works are revered relics to be reanimated. *Deadwing* now comes back as a three-CD and Blu-ray plus book set. Alongside the 2018 Wilson remaster and B-sides, the meat in the package is the inclusion of more than 70 minutes of demos, showing the work's innards. And the Blu-ray contains, among other tidbits, new "making of" doc *Never Stop The Car On A Drive In The Dark* and a 77-minute German TV special from 2005, with the sound newly gussied up. An accompanying 108-page book offers band history plus archive and Lasse Hoile photos.

The sinister drama of *Deadwing* itself is well known today. But what do the demos, the big reveal, sound like? Given Wilson's perfectionism, and the abilities of Richard Barbieri, Gavin Harrison and Colin Edwin, nobody would expect them to be ramshackle and bitty. Indeed, they're slick, tight, with an anti-glare sheen; a more explicit Radiohead.

The demo of *Arriving Somewhere But Not Here* opens with an electronic choir and shakers before anticipated service is resumed; the gorgeous tones of a Hillage-meets-Hackett guitar solo stand out. *Godfearing* is controlled grunge, the near-falsetto recalling 10cc's Eric Stewart, while the take of *Lazarus* is slightly sweeter, with a more nebulous middle eight. *Open Car* exits its blocks of riffing with a romantic coda. Least impressive is the incongruous *Vapour Trail*, which could, scarily, be Noel Gallagher busking *That's Entertainment*.

Redemption comes with two instrumentals and *Glass Arm Jam*, which realise that noir doesn't have to mean Black Sabbath, investigating more spacey, mellow, even dubby, atmospherics. Full-on fans who pay top dollar for this set will love every twitch and tweak.

CHRIS ROBERTS

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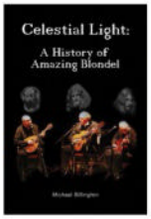
CELESTIAL LIGHT: A HISTORY OF AMAZING BLONDEL

Michael Billington EPONA PUBLISHING

Medievally fixated 70s prog-folkers' tale told.



Amazing Blondel carved a niche in the early 70s counterculture with a brand of early music-influenced folk rock that was heavily populated with brave knights and fair maidens. Initially splitting in 1977, they've been performing in some form on and off since a 1997 reunion. Longtime fan Michael Billington has seemingly talked to all who were there, but pads out the tale with irrelevant lists (such as every later-notable actor that appeared in a Robin Hood TV series, which influenced the early Blondel) and reproducing archive interviews and reviews in full where judicious editing might have helped the narrative along.

Stories that may have been amusing or entertaining – the difficulties of tuning their instruments at gigs, having their gear robbed in Italy – are related with all the colour of a police report, while some members' distaste for past music goes unexamined – guitarist Eddie Baird calls *Sinfonia For Guitar And Strings* "a load of crap" but we don't find out why.

On the plus side, the book benefits from some great archive photos and posters (including one of the band playing the first Glastonbury in 1970), and anyone desperate to know the height, shoe and glove size of the model on their debut album cover is in luck. **JS**

RICHARD WEST

Maybe A Writer: My Life In Threshold KINGMAKER

Threshold keyboard player reflects on four decades in prog.

Threshold's Richard West takes readers on an amiable amble through his life on and offstage in this charming autobiography. Devoid of rock star pretensions, West starts out playing piano in church, while one unfortunate experience with drugs leaves him feeling so discombobulated he never dabbles again (he recounts with horror the experience of touring alongside US band Psychotic Waltz, with their enthusiasm for bongs and porn).

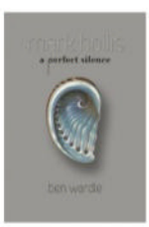
While it's not *The Dirt* by any stretch of the imagination, a little rock'n'roll tomfoolery makes its presence felt in *Maybe A Writer*. There are onstage tantrums and a backstage dust-up, although West discretely avoids revealing the identity of the participants. Elsewhere, his dream of buying a house in the Czech Republic descends into something between tragedy and farce as everything that can go wrong does.

Among changing line-ups and record labels, there emerges a portrait of how hard it is for bands at this level to survive, never mind thrive, despite Threshold cracking the German charts and earning glowing album reviews. West is candid about the challenges that come with playing progressive metal, yet it's abundantly clear that he wouldn't choose any other path in life. **DW**

MARK HOLLIS: A PERFECT SILENCE

Ben Wardle ROCKET 88

A penetrating study of Talk Talk's maverick leader.



Though it was No Doubt's hit take on Talk Talk's early synthpop single *It's My Life* that eventually financed Mark Hollis' first Porsche, acclaim and posthumous near-sainthood came via his avant-garde masterpiece *Spirit Of Eden*. Like its follow-up *Laughing Stock*, it saw Hollis go to extraordinary lengths to realise jazz and minimalist classical-influenced music. "What would [that part] be like if you played it like you were a rhesus monkey?" he asked one contributor.

Interviewing pretty much every relevant party still willing to talk, Ben Wardle's detailed chronology of Hollis' life and career is a fascinating glimpse behind the veil. It presents him in all his complexity: the cripplingly shy performer who hid behind mirrored sunglasses and alcohol; the wind-up merchant who told journalists that comedian Russ Abbot was a musical genius; the King Crimson, Bartók, *Eastenders* and Ducati motorcycles fan who was devastated by the death of his heroin-addicted elder brother Ed, aged 37.

After effectively retiring from the music industry, Hollis was only contactable via his wife Flick's email. The lasting impression is of a self-contained, uncompromising individual happiest when being a family man. **JMC**

PINK FLOYD: THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON: THE OFFICIAL 50TH ANNIVERSARY BOOK

Jill Furmanovsky & Aubrey Powell THAMES & HUDSON

Hefty tome to help tick away the moments that make up a dull day.

At a point where it seems impossible for another word to be added about *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, one of the most written-about records of all time, Pink Floyd have perfectly sidestepped the issue with their customary remote grace by hardly adding any at all.

> **It allows its audience free rein to interpret its content.**

Instead, this much-anticipated 50th anniversary book — bundled into the lavish *TDSOTM* box set but also available as a stand-alone tome — is a high-production photo album, with the minimum of topping and tailing: a complete gig sheet, some press cuttings and roughs of the iconic cover. In typical Floyd style, they let the visuals do the talking.

Broadly covering the touring life of *The Dark Side Of The Moon* from 1972 to 1974 and divided into self-explanatory sections headlined Backstage, Soundcheck, Shows and After Show, the 146 pictures printed here are mainly the work of Jill Furmanovsky. Floyd embraced the then-teenage photographer and granted her unprecedented access. Interspersed are shots by their close friends, Hipgnosis' Aubrey Powell and Storm Thorgerson, all reproduced in clearest quality on high-end paper stock.

While the one-image-per-page approach may seem stingy, it's an approach that works. Captions are located at the back of the book, where Floyd archivist Tracey Kraft has carefully provided plenty of detail for each photo, allowing fans plenty of cross-referencing fun. (Want to know where and when that image of Storm Thorgerson staring at smoking Roger Waters backstage was taken? Kraft has the answer.)

Elsewhere, rare and unseen shots shed new light on what life was like backstage, onstage and in the audience at Floyd gigs back then, whether it's backing singers Carlena Williams and Venetta Fields rolling cigarettes offstage, the road crew preparing the model plane prop, or fans in utter rapture and silhouetted making the pyramid sign with their hands.

There are some nice unspoken insights in the book, too. For a group where so much has been made of their divisions, it's difficult to see anything less than a band of brothers on a huge adventure, whether onstage, checking into hotels or playing squash (it can only be a matter of time before Waters' 'onion bagger' T-shirt is replicated).

...The Dark Side Of The Moon: The Official 50th Anniversary Book is a stately addition to the Pink Floyd bookshelf, that allows its audience free rein to interpret its content, just like the album itself did 50 years ago.

DARYL EASLEA

Take a bow

LEPROUS

VENUE	O2 SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE, LONDON
DATE	07/02/2023
SUPPORT	MONUMENTS, KALANDRA

While Kalandra lift...

...Monuments crush!

Lovers of Leprous have been spoilt since the pandemic. Over the past two years, the Norwegian prog idols have flown across the North Sea four times to enchant our island with their uniquely pop-, rock- and trip hop-flavoured anthems. First it was that 20th-anniversary run, where they performed two songs from each of their seven albums in chronological order. Then they supported Devin Townsend at the Royal Albert Hall, ahead of festival slots at Radar and ArcTanGent last summer.

For all those forays into Blighty though, Leprous have never had the opportunity to play a headline show spotlighting the melodies and creative breadth of their latest album, 2021's *Aphelion*. The band have long maintained the belief that genre constraints are bullshit, and that LP's balance of symphonic grandeur, prog rhythms and radio-baiting hooks flaunt that fact. So too does the smörgåsbord of artists that have been picked to open for them tonight.

Starting the evening in front of a pleasingly packed O2 Empire are **Kalandra**, whose convergence of prog, folk, pop and rock sounds like it was written by Kate Bush and Wardruna while they were snowed in at some Scandinavian shack. Dainty acoustic guitars are layered on top of booming war drums, yet it's singer Katrine Stenbekk who's most hypnotic. Her lengthy vocal lines run the gamut from hums to all-consuming wails, and by the time she's powered through the crescendo of *Borders*, she's affirmed her band as must-watch prospects. Give them money now.

While Kalandra want to hypnotise you into a fantasy land, **Monuments** are out to bludgeon you to hell. There's no cushioning from the fact that they're a burly prog metal band, especially when frontman Andy Cizek is growling his lungs out and a contingent of headbangers are opening a whirlpool of a moshpit up front. However, looking past the audial violence of their roars and riffs, there's an undeniable precision to what these lads do. While Cizek belts out many a soulfully sung chorus (hopefully he'll become the first Monuments vocalist to actually stick around for a bit), the musicians around him indulge in fast-fingered playing and polyrhythms. As *The Cimmerian*, the eight-minute finale to last year's avant-garde opus *In Stasis*, ends the set, it's impossible to dispute these aggressors' prog credentials.

> **"Leprous have reaffirmed themselves as prog's most consistently flawless live act."**

Very few bands could make sense after a bill of atmospheric rock succeeded by rampaging prog metal. But **Leprous** do. After all, the quintet originally emerged as acolytes of prog maverick Ihsahn, and early albums *Tall Poppy Syndrome* and *Bilateral* were feasts of heavy maximalism seasoned with the occasional scream. The decade since, though, has been all about reeling back the heaviness and dialling up the eclecticism, flirting with whatever genres Einar Solberg and co are drawn to that day.

Opener and *Aphelion* deep cut *Have You Ever?* makes no bones about showing off the Norwegians' style-smashing ways. Its pulsing synths are gradually joined by stark drum beats and math rock guitar chords, while the cellos are played live by unofficial sixth member Raphael Weinroth-Browne. It's a slow warm-up for the big smoke, though it also establishes many a constant that'll stay throughout the night.

For starters, Leprous look like stars. Every shuffling rhythm is accompanied by its own blast of spotlights, while colours vibrantly flow up and down LED tubes across the stage. The splendour peaks early when *Have You Ever?* explodes into the off-kilter guitar hits that introduce *The Price*, yet frontman Solberg is confidently rooted to the ground, playing his synthesiser and casually crooning the most splendid of falsetto notes. His vocal prowess has long been well documented, and tonight is no exception, especially when *Castaway Angels* floats from acoustic balladry to a post-rock climax.

Leprous clearly relish in finally honouring *Aphelion*, since six of its 10 tracks are thrust onto the setlist. However, *Bilateral*'s *Restless* also sneaks in: a vigorous lob back to the band's prog metal roots, defined by its twiddling guitars and shouting hook. As much as it's an endearing Easter egg, tonight's clearly more about honouring the now. And honoured it should be. On *Aphelion*, Leprous concocted the most boundary-destroying tunes of their entire career. Now, on its supporting tour, they've reaffirmed themselves as prog's most consistently flawless live act.

MATT MILLS

Simen Børven means business!

KEVIN NIXON

Einar Solberg leads the congregation in a flawless set.

Leprous are so wrapped up in the moment, they fail to notice the spaceship landing behind them...

Leprous blind us with their talent.

Mind-bending (and wrist-straining) prog goodness!

Solberg and co can finally put Aphelion under the spotlight.

Tor Oddmund Suhrke: destroying boundaries.

KATATONIA / SÓLSTAFIR

VENUE	O2 FORUM KENTISH TOWN, LONDON
DATE	10/02/2023
SUPPORT	SOM

You have to feel sorry for **SOM**. When the Americans arrive to serenade the O2 Forum with their prog-inflected shoegaze, it's 10 minutes after doors and almost nobody's about. However, those who walk in during the set get the most crystalline of entrance music complemented by frontman Will Benoit's drawn-out croons.

The singer and his bandmates are silhouetted against their backdrop, yet SOM still look like stars. Spotlights shine through the rising smoke and flash with every striking snare. It all cultivates a visual magnificence that not even tonight's first headliner can emulate.

For **Sólstafir**, emotional devastation is all that matters. Post-rock's saddest cowboys take the stage under a blue hue, with zero frills, and immediately let their melancholic music and Icelandic-language lamentations envelope London. It's depressed prog music shoved through the filter of classic rock, as the four-piece repeatedly crescendo from windswept ambience to uptempo drums and chords. And it's a spell that never wanes.

The audience are often caught in a standstill, letting the sorrow wash over them, although megahit *Fjara* does beget roars of delight. Also, frontman Addi Tryggvason seems to be in ironically high spirits. Not only does he introduce his band by paraphrasing Led Zeppelin ("We're Sólstafir and we come from the land of the ice and snow!"), he then indulges in some repartee with his audience ahead of *Goddess Of The Ages*, trying to ignite the best screams he can. For anybody who finds glee in the gloomy, these 75 minutes are nirvana.

Katatonia are merchants of misery too, but the similarities between them and their tourmates end there. Instead of sweeping landscapes, the Swedes deal in svelte anthems inspired by rain-soaked cities. Londoners can relate. Opener *Austerity* observes '*I hear traffic behind/Violent rain...*', painting an urban setting as intense as the song's polyrhythmic drum pattern. *Birds* later follows suit, begging for clear skies through its bright refrain, after dropping an Iron Maiden-esque guitar lead on top of shuffling percussion.

All the while, the purveyors of such infectious angst are concealed in smoke, their shadows cast against looming green lighting. The lack of rock star showmanship comes full circle to create darkly enigmatic theatre, like when the outline of singer Jonas Renkse humbly bows at the end of *Old Heart Falls*' chorus. His introduction of *My Twin* reveals shades of Scandinavian humour ("This is, I think, our only hit song") but, beyond that, this is bleak from the word go. The irony is that such sing-alongs as *July* and *Evidence* have actually lent the Forum escape from the dreary cityscape outside for just one fleeting evening.

MATT MILLS

HEILUNG

VENUE	BRIDGEWATER HALL, MANCHESTER
DATE	17/01/2023
SUPPORT	EIVØR, LILI REFRAIN

The atmospheric Lili Refrain.

Eivør: reaching the heights others can't.

Heilung are a force to be reckoned with. After their first live ritual went viral on YouTube in 2017, the trio from Denmark, Norway and Germany have seemingly taken over the globe. Their most recent album, *Drif*, saw their popularity soar as well as a contract for *Hellblade II* with game developers Ninja Theory secured, but what is it about the experimental folk collective that fans just can't get enough of?

The first act this evening is Italy-based **Lili Refrain**, who creates a meditative atmosphere with her layers of dark textures, pierced only by the sound of her soaring vocals and chanting. A truly cathartic experience and phenomenal start to the night's events.

Eivør ascends ethereally to the stage; the Faroese singer-songwriter has featured on the popular *God Of War* soundtracks as well as TV show *The Last Kingdom*. She treats us to an extended rendition of the latter's main theme, which is nothing short of transcendent. Forty minutes float by as if the very concept of time is a lie and her soothing voice reaches some truly impressive heights while she layers drums, guitar and a backing cello to phenomenal effect.

After a short intermission, **Heilung**'s symbols of healing are cast across Bridgewater Hall's walls and alcoves. The collective describe their performances as "amplified history" and the mysterious green light cast across the stage — which is adorned with real tree branches, antlers, instruments containing ashes and human blood as well as no fewer than 10 microphones — demonstrates that description before they even set one (bare) foot onstage. A dark hooded figure carries out a ritualistic cleansing of the stage, swooshing smoke across the props and instruments and into the crowd, while a soundtrack of chirping birds and forest noises rings out across the hall.

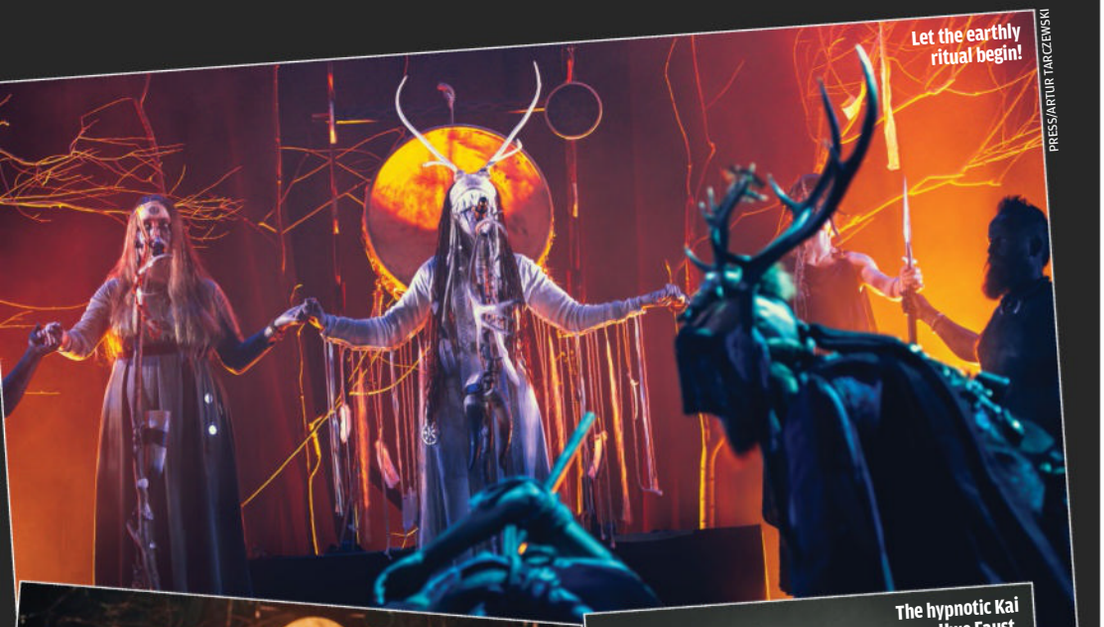
Piercing sounds from Heilung's Maria Franz.

The studio artists emerge silently, and rather than the whoops and cheers you'd expect from a sold-out crowd, the room is deathly silent. The trio, made up of Kai Uwe Faust (vocals), Christopher Juul (music and production) and Maria Franz (vocals) are soon joined by an array of touring musicians and actors described as Heilung Warriors to perform their intense opening ritual.

Heilung build their set slowly, but never break their stride. Opener *In Maidjan* transforms the silent ritual into guttural

Heilung mix ancient with modern to conjure up something special.

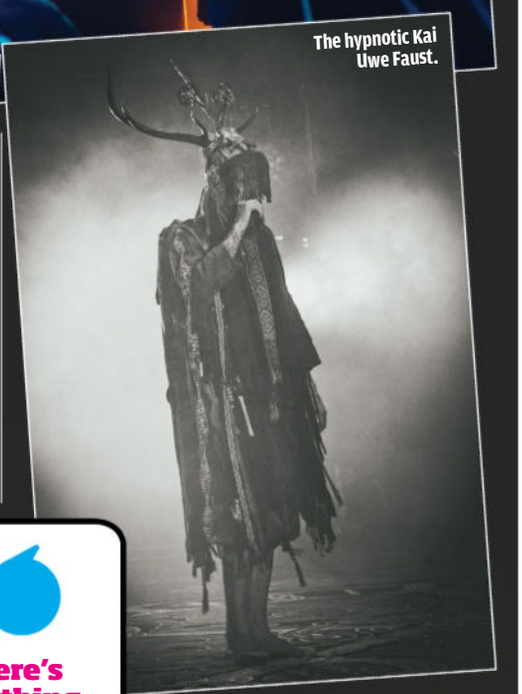
KEVIN ASHBURN X5


Let the earthly ritual begin!

PRESS/ARTUR TARCZEWSKI

Heilung's Warriors.

PRESS/ARTUR TARCZEWSKI


The hypnotic Kai Uwe Faust.

vocals, throat singing, pounding drums and layering of almost every instrument onstage. Franz's melodic vocals pierce through the contrasting deep, booming voices accompanying her. *Traust* builds up to a release that feels like releasing a coil from a tight grip and explodes into something far more than its recorded version.

There's something eerily beautiful about the way Heilung take ancient texts that are thousands of years old and create a performance that no living artist has accomplished before. The themes of love, life, death and war are all told through the music and performance in a hypnotic way. Heilung aren't a rock band, they're certainly not a metal band, there's not any true way to shoehorn them towards a genre, but what is progressive about their approach is the way they mix modern and ancient mediums, languages and art styles in a phenomenon that you simply can't tear your eyes away from.

"There's something eerily beautiful about the way Heilung take ancient texts that are thousands of years old and create a performance that no living artist has accomplished before."

The extended finale, *Hamrer Hippyer,* sees every member lose themselves to the pounding beat of the music. As the crowd emerge from their silent trance, the Warriors spread out throughout the venue to encourage wild dancing, howling and hollering. It's so cathartic, beautiful and unifying that it's impossible not to join in. Heilung may be an acquired taste, but their live rituals are a spectacle that must be experienced.

CHERI FAULKNER

ATOMIC ROOSTER

VENUE	100 CLUB, LONDON
DATE	29/01/2023
SUPPORT	THE GALILEO 7

"But none of the original ones are left in the band," argues a man standing next to *Prog* a few minutes before the show. Atomic Rooster have had countless different line-ups during their 50-odd-year career and the current one stands up solidly when compared with Carl Palmer and Vincent Crane's original formation back in '69.

But first, the arduous task of breaking the quiet melancholy of a Sunday evening has been assigned to **The Galileo 7**, a Kent quartet fuelled by garage and high-energy psychedelic pop. The band successfully catapult the audience back in time to the era of the 45, especially on songs such as *You Tear My Mind Wide Open* and a very enjoyable rendition of Pink Floyd's *Astronomy Domine*.

After a quick interval, **Atomic Rooster**'s long-serving, silver-quiffed guitarist Steve 'Boltz' Bolton's suddenly appears onstage, signalling the beginning of what will be an all-thriller-no-filler heavy prog night. It's been three years since the quintet last hit the 100 Club's stage and it's clear just how eager they are to get under the spotlights. They set the bar high by kicking off their set with golden oldies *Sleeping For Years*, *Save Me* and *I Can't Take No More*.

Keyboardist Adrian Gautrey, who joined the band in 2017, has some very huge shoes to fill but does a magnificent job, without making it seem like too strenuous a task. Watching him interact with the rhythm session of bassist Shug Millidge and drummer Paul Everett is pure joy; the three play precisely, with constant smiles on their faces. The group deliver a high-quality performance on the more introspective tunes too: vocalist Pete French's interpretation of *Black Snake* feels intimate, despite the scattered setup of the venue, and *Decision/Indecision* is delivered with the gravitas it requires.

Paul Everett's drumming skills are second to none and they shine bright during the more technical *A Spoonful Of Bromide Helps The Pulse Rate Go Down, VUG* and *Head In The Sky*.

"We haven't seen each other since Germany!" exclaims French, signalling that tonight's high-quality show is exclusively the fruit of the musicians' onstage jamming.

Bolton delivers his powerful riffs and solos on *Death Walks Behind You* and *Devil's Answer* with flair and a sense of fun. The band end on an absolute high with their Top 20 hit *Tomorrow Night*, after which French pokes fun at the stuffy encore ritual. The crowd give them a long, deserved round of applause, before we're left with a heart-pounding rendition of *Breakthrough*. Atomic Rooster might not have retained their original line-up but when they sound this good, who cares?

GIULIA MASCHERONI

SOFT MACHINE

VENUE	NEW CROSS INN, LONDON
DATE	03/02/2023

Experimental rock, art-rock, jazz rock prog jazz, jazz, proto-prog... name a genre with 'rock', 'jazz' or 'prog' in it, and during their lifetime Soft Machine have blown a tune in it. There's been a lot of water under the bridge, a lot of serious talent through the in/out doors and a lot of fabulous music from this band name across their 50-plus years. Anyone who hasn't regularly cocked an ear during the different phases across that half-century might have difficulty finding a stylistic thread running from the original, Canterbury scene cornerstone Soft Machine of the mid-60s, to today's jazz-you-like-it version. But, not really surprisingly, the DNA helix has endured and is audible.

Welcome to the Machine. Tonight at the New Cross Inn in south London the venue is packed, the mood is upbeat and there's an air of eager anticipation as Soft Machine take the stage, with added interest due to it introducing their new drummer, Asaf Sirkis. With a rack of albums to pull a gig's worth of music from, the set (split in half) is a well-paced, end-to-end time-travelling adventure that stretches from the first tune Soft Machine ever recorded – a jaunty-to-dark *Joy Of A Toy* – to the latest ones from their as-yet unreleased new album.

Penny Hitch, riding Fred Thelonious Baker's simple bass riff (with shades of *Slightly All The Time* from commercial peak *Third*), is a great opener, its hypnotic groove coaxing the audience to take a step or two closer. The gentle and quite beautiful guitar/soprano sax duet *Heart Off Guard* segues into *Broken Hill*, an airy, spacious vehicle for guitarist John Etheridge to deliver the best solo of the night. Some will doubtless disagree and say it was his tour de force in *Hazard Profile Part One* in which his mercurial flurries and overall fluidity are astonishing, or Theo Travis' dynamic sax excursion through *Out-Bloody-Rageous*. "Don't try dancing to this, Etheridge advises beforehand. "It's in 15/8." No one does.

Jazz gigs can often be stuffy affairs, with little said to the audience between numbers except mumbled titles and the odd less-than-convincing "Thank you." None of that here. As well as being an exceptional guitarist, Etheridge has a natural rapport with an audience, his introductions and anecdotes engaging and full of easy humour.

Soft Machine 2023 are certainly not surviving or resting on their jewelled legacy. They have a new album out in June, and previews tonight including the aggressive-edged *Open Doors* and the expansive, 60s-tinted *Fell To Earth* suggest there's plenty of gas still in the tank of this wonderful institution.

A review in *Prog* in 2019 said: "No band of this vintage have any right to still sound so fearless and ferocious." Actually, they do. And they do.

PAUL HENDERSON

VON HERTZEN BROTHERS

VENUE	THE GARAGE, LONDON
DATE	02/01/2023

The Von Hertzens feel the love tonight.

A forest of blue knives stands against a blood-red sun. A low, resonating synth note lifts us sharply from our beers. The backdrop is set, and the mood is not *quite* of this world — or certainly not of this place, this time. They might be travelling with a minimal production (reflective of the budget struggles felt by so many bands in these post-pandemic times) but the Von Hertzen Brothers know how to command an audience, conjuring an immersive, wintery slice of darkest Finland in London this Thursday night.

> **"Von Hertzen Brothers know how to command an audience, conjuring an immersive, wintery slice of darkest Finland in London."**

Almost a year on from its release, *Red Alert In The Blue Forest* stands confidently as the brothers' strongest record yet; a majestic, ambitious expression of what progressive rock can, and should, be all about. So it's gratifying to find them opening with the first two tracks of that record (*Day Of Reckoning* and *Blue Forest*), which wear their size and scale with ease.

From here they dive into a set that offers the sort of lush, anthemic 21st-century prog that anyone missing Anathema should find solace in. Accordingly, there are new and old-world shades. Guitarist/oldest brother Kie Von Hertzen goes full-Gilmour for the brooding, 70s-Floyd epic *Somewhere In The Middle*, complemented by cavernous drums from Sami Kuoppamäki. Instruments are held aloft following a clever, pummelling *Freedom Fighter*, while the Eastern, minor-key twang and thunder of *Trouble* is only slightly dampened by a false start due to tech issues.

"Absolute belter!" a statuesque Mikko Von Hertzen grins to the cheers that greet *New Day Rising*, 2015's Foo Fighters-via-Genesis single that,

"Absolute belter!" Mikko Von Hertzen.

Jonne Von Hertzen adds his own touches to the intimate show.

WILL IRELAND

Pedal on! Kie knows exactly which buttons to press!

Brothers in riffs: Kie and Mikko lock in.

in another life, might have made them massive. "I learned that word from *MasterChef Australia*," he explains, visibly delighted. "Absolute belter!"

Things veer off course again as the folkloric *All Of A Sudden, You're Gone* is restarted, while technical gremlins are handled by the band and their monitor guy. "We are travelling this time without technicians," Mikko admits before adding, with a sly smile: "Next time, if you buy merch..." No one is complaining, and we can't help wishing more bands would see that it's often hiccups like this that create real closeness with audiences. Warmth. Intimacy. A sense of the people behind those transportive musical micro-universes.

Snowballing on from pop-sized prog anthems like the aforementioned *Trouble* and (*Prog* Award winner) *Flowers And Rust*, the night finds them stretching their storytelling, cinematic muscles. All the while the tunes themselves remain key. If this were 1976 they'd each have their own manor estate, fleets of Rolls Royces and technicians for their technicians.

And yet for all their would-be hitmaker sensibilities, there are things that keep the Von Hertzens comfortably left-leaning. Twists, eccentricities and trend-resistant tendencies. The Nordic chills. The spiritual strains. The almost monkish three-part harmonies. The willingness to marry the accessible and the weird, from the *Led Zeppelin III*-esque hoodoo of *The Promise* to the short, punchy rock swagger of *Insomniac*.

They return for an encore of *Sunday Child* before closing with *Red Alert...*'s long, luxury-prog pinnacle, *Peace Patrol*. It says so much that they can give the people what they legitimately want by ending with a sprawling song from their most recent album, rather than having to lean on old favourites never topped. Even without the saxophone of the recorded version (replaced tonight by Robert Engstrand on keys) it's a grand finale, indicative of a band at the peak of their powers. Kuoppamäki beams blissfully behind the drums, arms swaying as the audience's 'woaahh' chants repeat over and over, wanting the moment to go on; to stay in this dreamy space for a bit longer. Technical issues? What technical issues?

POLLY GLASS

KINDRED SPIRIT BAND

VENUE	THE HANWELL CAVERN, LONDON
DATE	03/02/2023
SUPPORT	BRING THE ANGELS, MATT WYATT

The Hanwell Cavern is a delightful, bijou, occasional music club set in the vaulted basements of the huge, Victorian Grade II listed Hanwell Community Centre. With cabaret-style tables and seating, it's ideal for solo acts and acoustic music and is clearly a labour of love for its team of almost exclusively volunteers.

Local singer-songwriter **Matt Wyatt**, kicks things off tonight with a set of original songs and wryly chosen covers. His smooth, assured vocal delivery, easy manner and gentle humour are an endearing and enjoyable combination.

Levels of both volume and raw rock quotient increase considerably with **Bring The Angels** taking the stage. Made up mainly of recent BRIT School alumni, they run through a slightly rough and ready set of mostly classic rock covers delivering enthusiasm and entertainment. The MVP award has to go here to young guitarist Lucy Gowen who is very definitely one to watch.

Treading the boards for some time now, as a solo act and in various acoustic ensembles, founder and frontwoman of **Kindred Spirit**, Elaine Samuels, comes solidly from the British folk and singer-songwriter traditions. With a refreshed line-up crammed onto the modest stage, opener *No Smoke Without Fire: Elemental* sets out the band's stall – 70s-flavoured folk rock framing Samuels' sometimes winsome, sometimes hearty and often earnest vocals, peppered with flute or sax from Stevie Mitchell and sparkling lead guitar interjections from Piers Hogg. Featuring the undeniable pedigree of The Far Meadow's Keith Buckman on bass and with the band keen to label what they do as "prog", the moments during the gig where they encroach on such territory suggest less symphonically or rock-inclined influences – *The Alchemyst* has a touch of the Canterbury scene about it, *The Phoenix* demonstrates some creative songwriting and allows Mitchell to exercise her wide ranging talents and *Dragonfire* suggests early Tull or British folk rock pioneers Spirogyra. A couple of songs offer a bit of experimentation – *Metamorphosis* sits on a great bass and drum groove and new song *All About The Money* has a late-60s psych element to it – but in both cases potential isn't quite realised.

Previously, the band included Martin Ash, whose fiddle playing, expressive shape throwing and occasional jaunts into audiences widened the sound palette and injected some visual interest, both of which, in tonight's performance, would have lifted proceedings markedly.

There's much here to interest a prog-friendly audience, but a feeling persists that there are missed opportunities with the material and a need for a bit more excitement and energy.

GARY MACKENZIE

LONG DISTANCE CALLING

VENUE	BOSTON MUSIC ROOM, LONDON
DATE	15/02/2023

It's been seven years since German post-rock quartet Long Distance Calling graced these shores, and they make tonight's gig by the skin of their teeth thanks to being caught up in bureaucratic red tape at customs, the likes of which Brexiteers told us would become a thing of the past once the new system was in place. One would love to know what their excuse is now?

The Münster band are still hurriedly setting up their equipment as *Prog* enters the venue, before launching into *Enter: Death Box*, the opener from their most recent album, *Eraser*, and the first of five tracks highlighting that release. They follow with *Giants Leaving* and *Blades*, also from *Eraser*, and as their sound settles, it's clear the band pack quite a punch.

Having long straddled prog and post-rock, it's interesting to watch Long Distance Calling simply to observe what kind of audience they attract. This being the band's first UK show since 2016, there's understandably a healthy crowd out to see them, but only a handful of recognisable faces from the usual prog audience in London, possibly a reflection that some of those fans still don't really get post-rock? Or want to. The remainder range from alt-rock types to earnest bearded fellows, nodding along to the hypnotic beat. Judging from shouts-out, there are plenty of the band's fellow Germans in attendance too.

Long Distance Calling throw themselves into proceedings with relieved gusto, bassist Jan Hoffmann's clenched fist raised in salute at the end of every song. Equally, eschewing any kind of keyboards, the intensity of the band's live approach on the likes of *Immunity* and *Black Paper Planes* means the finesse of their recorded counterparts is somewhat lacking, resulting in the usual quiet/loud/quiet post-rock dynamic being more loud/loud/loud this evening.

But that's about the only criticism that can be levelled at them tonight. The more atmospheric *Kamilah*, also from the new album, is a real high point of the set. Guitarist David Jordan delights the crown with some searing fretwork during an energetic *Out There* before a pulsating rendition of *Eraser* itself brings the set to a close.

They return for a rendition of *Metulsky Curse Revisited*, a song that even predates 2007's *Satellite Bay* debut album – and clearly delights their fellow countrymen in the audience – before leaving, showering the crowd with thanks for attending and yet more apologies for their tardiness, although in reality there are no apologies necessary. They got on with the job at hand with style where many would have let it affect their performance. Let's hope a few more proggers make the effort next time they visit these shores.

JERRY EWING

KARNIVOOL

VENUE	O2 INSTITUTE, BIRMINGHAM
DATE	10/02/2023
SUPPORT	THE OCEAN

Karnivool are exhilarating and definitely worth the wait!

Having been forced to ditch their 2020 touring plans, Karnivool originally announced the Regeneration tour back in 2021. Several postponements later and we're finally under the roof of the O2 Institute awaiting the Australian five-piece. There's just one more thing standing between us and the progressive metal veterans, though: **The Ocean**.

Vocalist Loïc Rossetti dances serenely to the peaceful opening tones of *Triassic* as the crowd eagerly lap up every note from guitarist Robin Staps. As the track crescendos into a gargantuan wall of sound, the strobe lighting sets the perfect atmosphere — one that is almost uncomfortable yet strangely fitting for The Ocean's presence.

It's clear that the headliners have chosen quality rather than quantity as The Ocean are tonight's sole support act. Throughout the 50-minute set, they demonstrate their true capabilities, which are unfortunately dampened by the disappointing sound quality inside Birmingham's O2 Institute. Nevertheless, their crashing guitar riffs and Rossetti's aggressive vocals are mesmerising and the band perform in such a captivating way that everyone present must be eagerly awaiting the release of their new album, *Holocene*, in May.

After what feels like an eternity, the lights dim and the venue descends into pitch black, the only sound being whooping cheers. The energy from the audience is infectious and as **Karnivool** finally take to the stage with the monumental *C.O.T.E* there's nothing stopping huge smiles from spreading across the faces of everyone in the venue. Without skipping a beat, the band launch into *All It Takes*, the standalone single from 2021. Ian Kenny never misses a note and sounds better live than ever before. The lyrics echo from every corner of the venue as the crowd roars back appreciatively.

As this was originally billed as the Decade Of Sound Awake tour — it's now their Regeneration tour — it's only fitting that Karnivool then dive into material from that album for the next 25 minutes. Colossal songs, including *Goliath* and *Simple Boy*, whip the venue into a frenzy while we hang on Kenny's every word. Bathed in soft pools of orange light with piercing strobes, the Australians execute a fascinating demonstration of how progressive metal should be performed.

> **"In contrast to The Ocean's melancholic display of chaos, Karnivool are simply exhilarating tonight."**

In contrast to The Ocean's moody and melancholic display of chaos, Karnivool are simply exhilarating tonight. There's a constant crescendo to a massive sing-along moment and the frenetic guitar work combined with crashing drum fills and pounding bass ensures the room rarely remains still, culminating in a frankly euphoric atmosphere.

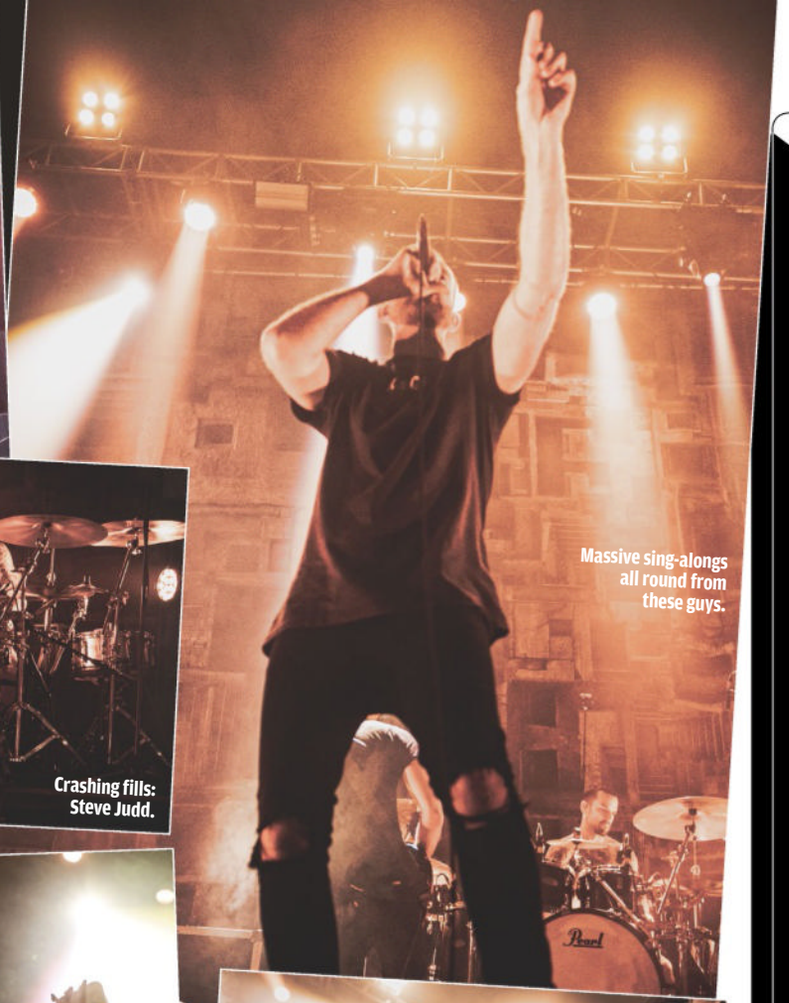
Despite launching prematurely into *Umbra* and almost forgetting the fascinating *Sky Machine*, Karnivool are comfortable enough to laugh off this slight slip-up, and given how perfect their display has been so far, no one in the crowd minds at all. Perhaps the biggest surprise of the night though is the welcome addition of *Roquefort*, which hasn't been played on any other date during this tour. This is the evening's 'faux' closer, but Karnivool shortly return to the stage following chants of, "Two more songs!" from the crowd.

Alpha Omega and *New Day* are the final tracks in this mammoth set, with the former bathing the venue in a moody red light and dropping the tempo while stripping the band's sound to give Kenny's vocals space to shine. As he apologises to those that may have missed their last bus to catch the end of the set we can't help but feel it's been entirely worth it just to witness this spectacle almost eight years since Karnivool last set foot on UK soil.

CHERI FAULKNER

The Ocean make waves with a captivating performance.

KEVIN ASHBURN

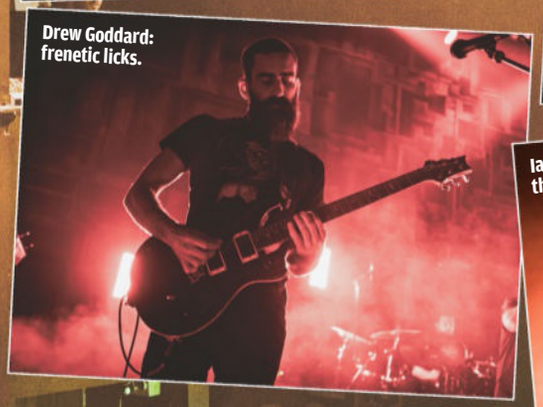


Massive sing-alongs all round from these guys.

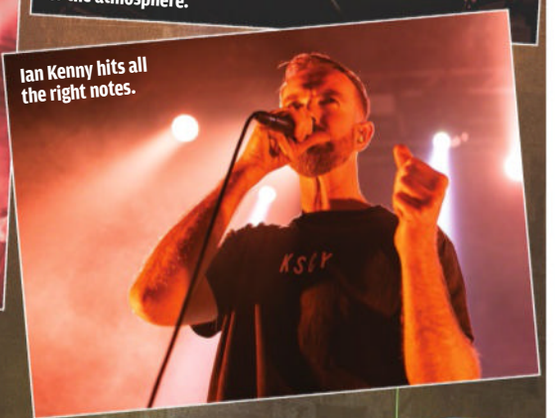
Crashing fills: Steve Judd.

Jon Stockman pounds his bass.

Mark Hosking adds to the atmosphere.



Drew Goddard: frenetic licks.



Ian Kenny hits all the right notes.

Karnivool: their regeneration is now complete!

TARJA

VENUE	KK'S STEEL MILL, WOLVERHAMPTON
DATE	02/02/2023

Finnish singer Tarja Turunen has been on this enchanting solo journey for 16 years now. And her powerful voice remains an impressive tool as she continues to wow crowds with her three-and-a-half octave range.

The lyrical soprano struts onstage, accompanied by an eclectic live band, and greets the audience with her usual charismatic flare and a big smile on her face. "Wolverhampton, we have missed you, let's rock and have some fun tonight!" she calls, before delving straight into the symphonic dark prog metal of *Serene* and *Demons In You*. After an outfit change she returns for the dramatic *Diva* and prowls the stage with an air of mystique. The keyboard-led *Silent Masquerade*, with its spoken intro, is captivating. It's a theatrical cut with sudden drum and tempo pattern changes that keeps the crowd entertained with enough solid guitar riffs to rock out to.

An abundance of ambient guitar solos come from Alex Scholpp, who cannot hide his enthusiasm, with Living Colour's Doug Wimbish swinging his bass around. His deep, funky bass lines alone make you want to get up and move. Ex-Apocalyptica cellist Max Lilja showcases his string skills with surging passion as he plays a number of demanding arrangements flawlessly, with clean articulation. It's easy to get lost in all the visceral gothic soundscapes, and sickly sweet synths, but the rapid snare-blasting middle section in the emotional *Tears In Rain* draws the crowd to its feet, hands raised and hair flying about, the crowd hit the kind of cathartic state that only seems to happen at a Tarja concert.

"This is always my favourite part of the show, it's just me and you; I can feel you and that's beautiful. This song is a celebration of life, you guys make live music what it is, and that's what we live for!" Tarja announces before playing the opening keys of *The Golden Chamber (Loputon Yö) / You And I*, her haunting voice central as she takes the lead with a stunning keyboard performance.

It's a deliciously dark set, melodic and kooky, with some progressive kinks pointing to some early Jefferson Airplane-esque stylings, notably the quirky instrumental intro of *Victim Of Ritual* and the song's disjointed sections. Turunen pauses and commands the crowd to sing along, and as the echoes of the last "Ohhhhh" float across the Mill, she accidentally drops the microphone on the floor. No diva strop however, just a self-effacing laugh as she directs attention to her fellow band members and the crowd cheers. An explosive four-track encore of *Innocence*, *I Walk Alone*, *Dead Promises* and *Until My Last Breath* bring tonight's dazzling display to a close, with Tarja's larger-than-life narrative and a masterful musicianship that's genuinely moving.

EMILY MACNEVIN

MOGWAI

VENUE	THE GARAGE, LONDON
DATE	06/02/2023

Highbury's 600-capacity grassroots club The Garage is celebrating its 30th birthday and nobody's better suited to lead festivities than Mogwai. Glasgow's post-rock heroes have graced this venue more times than most. They also recorded a John Peel session here back in 1997, then played the last show of their first-ever headline tour within these walls. Their passion for this place is clear through the fact that, with sentimentality aside, it would be fathoms beneath where they are now. For context, the last time Mogwai headlined in London, it was to a crowd of 10,000 at Alexandra Palace, a year removed from their surprise chart-topper of a 10th album, *As The Love Continues*. Tonight they'll be performing for a fraction of that number.

Despite the decrease in scope, Mogwai have still packed some arena-level pageantry for this intimate show. Not only is the gig riotously loud, to the point where the guitars rumble the chest in a manner usually reserved for the bass and drums, but the light show is ceaselessly magnificent. The band members are frequently silhouetted against their backdrop, as beams twirl in multiple colours during the shoegaze hypnosis of *Ritchie Sacramento*, before spotlights flash in time with *My Father, My King*'s snare smashes.

By contrast, the musicians themselves bring no semblance of rock star pomp with them. They arrive onstage with no intro tape, under a cloak of darkness, wearing T-shirts dedicated to Bauhaus and Converge. Guitarist Stuart Braithwaite is a minimalist speaker – despite being the band's de facto frontman by virtue of him singing *Ritchie...*, the sole cut tonight with vocals – his banter's limited to "Thank you" and "How you doing?"

However, that's no complaint, since the band's energy is clearly more focused on creating a display of progressive technicality. Multi-instrumentalist Barry Burns spends all night swapping between keys and guitars, before he's joined in tickling the ivories by bassist and co-founder Dominic Aitchison during *Remurdered*. The result is post-rock that's somehow as danceable as it is melancholic.

Ceiling Granny, lifted from *As The Love Continues*, similarly shimmers with eclecticism as it showcases uptempo post-punk riffing. *Mogwai Fear Satan* and *Yes! I Am A Long Way From Home* leap back to the noise rock of 1997's debut *Young Team*, lending a pleasing circularity in this venue that hosted the band when these songs were new.

The biggest throwback is reserved for the encore as Mogwai return for a last hurrah with *Summer*: the opener of their 1996 demo. It's a reference not unappreciated by the crammed crowd, whose delight continues until long after they've spilled out into London's streets.

MATT MILLS

LONELY ROBOT

VENUE	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON
DATE	08/02/2023

Mitchell and Blundell: two of modern prog's finest musicians.

Originally booked for February 2020, tonight's show was first postponed to December 2020, then December 2021, before finally alighting on the current date more than a year after that. That has to be some kind of record in terms of gig postponements!

Equally, in that time, Mitchell has released two more Lonely Robot albums, extending the band's life beyond the planned trilogy, as well as recording a new Arena album to boot. So what was originally billed – back in those heady, pre-pandemic days – 'An Evening With John Mitchell', has, over the course of three years, become a Lonely Robot gig, although the venue is still, somewhat confusingly, billing it as 'An Evening With John Mitchell' as *Prog* enters the classy confines of Islington's Assembly Hall.

It's been just over two months since Mitchell played this very same venue with his Frost* compatriots, one of whom, drummer Craig Blundell, is with him onstage tonight (and another, Jem Godfrey, is supporting his pal in the audience). But there's a more than healthy turnout for Mitchell, who, in a striking orange jacket, sets forth with the opening two tracks from 2015's *Please Come Home* debut: *Airlock* and *God Vs Man* serve as immediate reminders of what a fine songwriter and musician Mitchell is. His ability to marry catchy melodies with intricate progressively-inclined rock, along with his ear for a quality production sound, is what sets him apart from his peers. Where Frost* indulge in flights of musical bombast and fancy, and Arena go epic with the best of them, for Mitchell it's always about the song. It's what he does best.

Less natural to Mitchell is the role of the man in the spotlight. Even when fronting It Bites or Kino he's been part of a unit and has utilised the camaraderie between his fellow bandmates. Saddled with the lone responsibility of dealing with the audience, he seems far less comfortable. On occasion his self-deprecation can come across as bitterness, and while *Prog* is sure that's not the actuality, it seems the responsibility of doing the heavy lifting can, at times, weigh on him.

What probably doesn't help is the fact that, Blundell aside, his band seems to fall short. True, in Mitchell and Blundell you have two of the finest musicians of the modern prog era, and maybe the stage setup – which pitches The Paradox Twin and Cairo drummer Graham Brown, tonight on keyboards, directly opposite Blundell on the spartan stage – makes things feel unbalanced. Leaving backing singer Sarah Bayley (also The Paradox Twin and Cairo) stuck at the back of the stage doesn't help either. Bassist Steve Mills just seems lost, clearly having problems following Blundell's powerful lead, leaving the likes of *Digital God Machine* and *The Island Of Misfit Toys* feeling slightly off kilter, while Bayley falls short on *Oubliette*.

The pacing of the set just doesn't quite gel either. Guest vocalist Leddra Chapman is absolutely superb on an acoustic *Why Do We Stay?*, rendered even more impressive with Mitchell's declaration that they had never performed the song together, even in soundcheck, but followed by the soul-bearing *The Red Ballloon* it kills the momentum the band had built up, meaning they don't really have enough time to get back up to speed with *The Boy In The Radio* and *Species In Transition* before the main set is done. A bombastic Blundell solo between encores of *In Floral Green* and *Sigma* has a similar effect.

Yet for those gripes, it's still a good gig, just not perhaps as good as it could have been. Maybe the original idea of an evening of Mitchell's impressive catalogue of music might have been right? His stellar cover of Phil Collins' *Take Me Home* would enliven any gig on its own. Something that's worth thinking about, perhaps?

JERRY EWING

"John Mitchell's ability to marry catchy melodies with intricate progressively-inclined rock, along with his ear for a quality production sound, sets him apart from his peers."

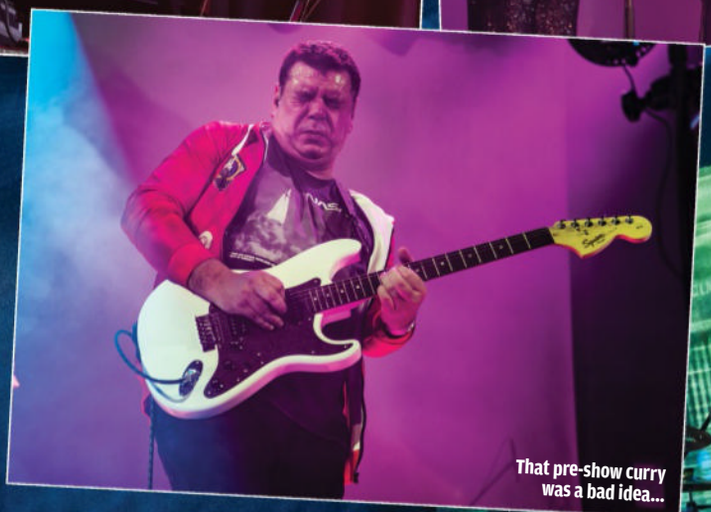
Craig Blundell brings things up to speed.

KEVIN NIXON

Lonely Robot's John Mitchell bares his soul.

Graham Brown swaps drums for keys tonight.

Sarah Bayley and Steve Mills lock in.



That pre-show curry was a bad idea...

Lonely no more: Mitchell's melodic project returns.

LEE ABRAHAM BAND

VENUE	THE 1865, SOUTHAMPTON
DATE	05/02/2023
SUPPORT	TIGER MOTH TALES (SOLO)

Lee Abraham is something of an unsung local hero. The proof is in the impressive turnout for a rare outing with his own band by the erstwhile Cosmograf live band member, now reunited and recording with Galahad. Though performing on home turf, audience members have travelled from as far as Newcastle and Wakefield for this chance to hear the guitarist play highlights from his nine solo albums.

It's no coincidence that **Peter 'Tiger Moth Tales' Jones** is supporting. He's been a guest vocalist on two of Lee Abraham's albums and delivers a cheerful, intimate keyboard-centric set comprising tuneful favourites *Light* and *Feels Alright*, plus the first-ever live rendition of *Rapa Nui*.

As blackness envelopes the stage, a fanfare heralds the main event. However, the triumphal moment is stymied by technical gremlins that silence **Lee Abraham**'s guitar. Rapidly regrouping, he and his accompanying trio unleash the labyrinthine *Counting Down*, a four-part epic from *Only Human* during which at least five guitar solos and eight tempo changes can be counted. It's an audaciously prog way to start the gig.

A mellower *Stay* from *Harmony/Synchronicity* spotlights Rob Arnold's atmospheric keyboards. His keys shimmer during *Harbour Lights* from *The Seasons Turn*, a song reflecting Abraham's AOR style, his guitar more soulful and understated. *The Mirror* from 2009 release *Black & White* energises the room, as Arnold's looping piano motif runs sonic circles around Abraham's gutsy guitar.

The title of *Warning Sign* from *Colours* evokes 80s Rush, as does its faster, slicker pace carried along by Ken Bryant's precision bass and the powerhouse drumming of Gerald Mulligan, who's hardly seen on his riser.

Abraham's a towering presence throughout, his fluid, melodic solos reminding everyone why he's one of the most highly regarded guitarists around. His vocals are very much on song tonight too. He invites Jones back onstage for *The Hands Of Time* from 2021's *Only Human*. Jones modulates his voice to bring depth to Abraham's music. *Corridors Of Power* from 2014's *Distant Days* has Abraham in full metal mode, one foot on the monitor, steely gaze scanning the darkness as he fires off bone-crunching riffs.

Coming back for an encore of *Awaken?* – not the Yes classic, but from *Comatose* – Team Abraham look well satisfied with the standing ovation. *Prog* hopes this rapturous reception might galvanise Abraham into playing more live dates, including festivals. For now, many audience members will be revisiting his extensive canon to relive some of tonight's finest moments.

ALISON REIJMAN

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PRESS

EDDIE MULDER (LEAP DAY)

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon**

Where's home?
I'm Frisian – I live in a small village in Friesland, in the north of The Netherlands.

What's your earliest prog memory?
When I was about 13 or 14 my friends were into Pink Floyd – the early stuff, like *Atom Heart Mother* and *Ummagumma*. That's where it started for me.

What was the first album that you bought?
Well, my grandmother gifted me *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, and after that I bought myself *Meddle*.

And the latest?
Gentle Giant's *In A Glass House*.

First prog gig?
Soft Machine, around 1975 to '76, in an old cinema in the nearby town of Heerenveen.

And the most recent?
Lifesigns at De Boerderij, last year. I was very much impressed, mostly by [bassist] Jon Poole – such a good performer and musician.

What's the best prog gig that you ever saw?
Yes on their Union tour at Ahoy, Rotterdam in 1991. It was an 'in the round' stage, and that and the overall sound and lighting really did impress me.

Your newest prog discovery?
Cardiacs – and they just keep amazing me.

Do you have a guilty musical pleasure?
Maybe 60s English [jazz] trio The Peddlers, and also English composer Neil Richardson [who wrote *Approaching Menace*, the theme tune to the TV quiz show *Mastermind*].

What's your favourite prog venue?
De Boerderij, Zoetermeer, because of their professional attitude and hospitality.

Who's your prog hero?
Yes, Zappa, Gentle Giant, Steve Hillage... the list goes on.

> Cardiacs are my newest prog discovery and they just keep amazing me.

The "amazing" Cardiacs in 1988.
PRESS/STEVE PAYNE

The mighty Steve Hillage.
OLLY CURTIS/GUITRIST

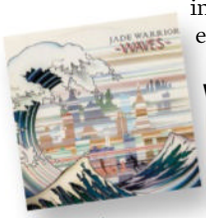
Outside of music, what else are you into?
Gardening, wandering in nature and visiting places with my wife, reading, my children and grandchildren. Not very rock'n'roll, I know.

Ever had a prog-related date?
My wife and I actually met through our mutual interest in Yes!

What's the most important piece of prog music?
For me it's all of Yes' *Relayer*.

Which muso would you most like to work with?
That's very difficult. Perhaps someone like Hans Zimmer.

What's the album that puts you in a good mood?
Any of the four instrumental albums Jade Warrior released in the 70s on Island, especially *Waves*.



What's your favourite prog album cover?
I have three: *Waves*, *Relayer* and *Fish Rising* by Steve Hillage. In those days, artistic freedom also was expressed in the layout.

What are you up to at the moment?
I'm working on my ninth solo album, hopefully out in October, and Leap Day are working on new music too. I'm also composing and playing guitar for a play here in Friesland, and that'll consume quite some time this year and carry on into 2024.

See www.eddiemulder.nl for more information.

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